



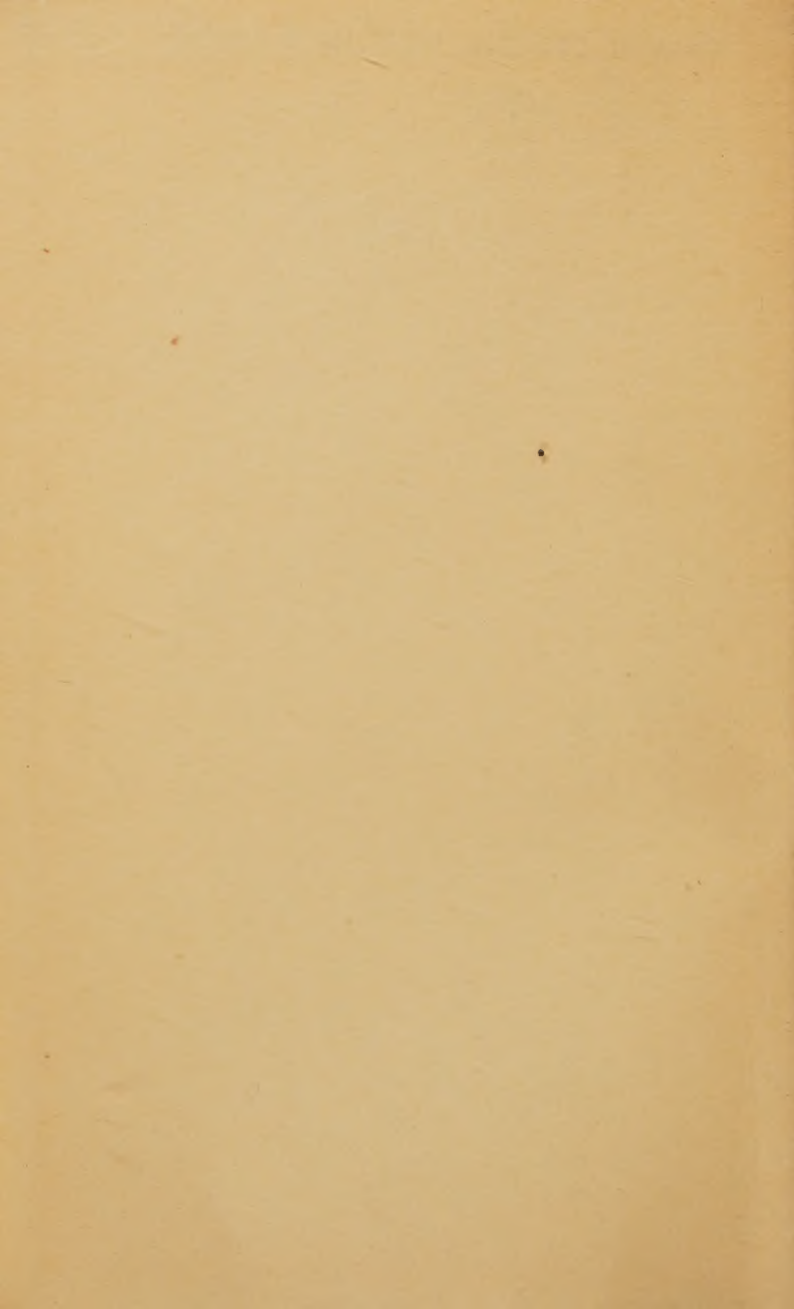


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LONDON: JAMES NISBET & CO., LIMITED

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# The Promised Rest

Here and Hereafter

BY THE  
*Edward*  
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FORMERLY EXHIBITIONER OF WADHAM COLLEGE, OXFORD;

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London

JAMES NISBET & CO., LIMITED

WIMBLEDON: T. SHAW

1904

Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & Co.  
At the Ballantyne Press



BT

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## Preface

THE Rest of Faith, of which we hear so much—what is it? Where is it to be found? The weary world replies, "It is not in me," and "the depth saith, it is not in me, and the sea saith, it is not in me." No wonder, since all around us surges and seethes and moans, a homeless ocean of unrest—unrest in thought, the very foundations of God's truth assailed; unrest in heart, reflected in the craze for pleasure, the mania for excitement at the gaming-table or the race; unrest of will, seen in the loss of reverence for authority, human or divine—all these things tell us that "the world can never give the bliss for which we sigh."

Some men, too wise to seek it in the world, look for it in the Church. The Church of Rome proclaims that rest is found alone within her borders; but when we inquire more closely we find, alas, that her armies are like those of her great prototype the Roman Empire, of whom it was written on their devastating march, "Silentium faciunt pacem appellant" ("They make a silence and they call it peace").

Not on these terms can troubled consciences accept her proffered rest, and yet whether in the

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world without, or in the professing Church within, or even in the true believer's heart, every pang and throb, every aching grief, every "wound concealed" is an argument for perfect rest. Perfect rest there must be somewhere—who has robbed us of it? How can it be restored? These are the questions which the Gospel undertakes to answer. Indeed, Rest is the Gospel in a monosyllable. It is its Alpha and Omega, its first word and its last. It is the comfort of the penitent, it is the paradise of the saint. Scripture is full of it from the Creation rest of Genesis to the Heavenly rest of Revelation.

The promise to Israel typified it, though as this very year I passed through the barren hills and stony plains of Judæa it needed no Scripture testimony to assure me that Joshua had failed to give the people rest (Heb. iv. 8). Earth cannot furnish it: union with Christ alone secures it.

It is in the hope that the lines which follow may be used to promote this union, and in so doing help to light travellers along the road which leads to the City of Heartsease and the Church of the Heavenly Rest that they are now offered to the reader.

EDW. W. MOORE.

EMMANUEL CHURCH PARSONAGE,  
WIMBLEDON,

*August 1904.*

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# THE PROMISED REST

## CHAPTER I

### ITS IDEAL

“We which have believed do enter into Rest.”—HEB. iv. 3.

REST ! it sounds like a message from the skies. Can there be rest in a distracted world like this ? “There is no rest in New York,” said a passenger to me once as we were crossing the Atlantic ; “I am coming to Europe to seek it.” Would he find it here ? I fear it is as rare in the Old World as the New. As we think of the strifes and the discords, the sorrows and the sins of weary humanity, we seem to hear the cry of the avenger sounding in our ears : “What hast thou to do with peace ; turn thee behind me.” Years ago in Switzerland I met a man, now no longer with us, famous then for ability and attainment in certain paths of scientific research. Remarkable he was, energy and resource stamped upon every feature ; but there was another mark not less noticeable which betrayed the scepticism he openly avowed.—It was UNREST. Strong man as he was, he was not anchored and you felt it. It must be

so. "Sabbathless Satan" leaves the mark indelible of his own restlessness, so it seems to me, upon every man who has fallen from his true centre, wandered from his orbit and plunged unguided into the dark abyss. How can he rest who has no resting-place? But where shall that resting-place be found?

"O birds from out the East,  
O birds from out the West,  
Have ye found that happy City  
In all your weary quest? •  
Can ye tell me of that City  
The name whereof is Rest?"

Nay, "it is kept close from the birds of the air." But "there is a path which no fowl knoweth" that will lead us through the gates. It is the way of faith. "We which have *believed* do enter into rest." Listen once more to the old familiar words: "Come unto ME all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you REST" (Matt. xi. 28).

Who is this that dares to say it? Whoever He is, He has plumbed the depths of the hearts of those to whom He speaks. See what He offers us. Not riches, not rank, not aught of the tinsel prizes of a dying world, but that for which this mysterious, shallow, profound nature of ours is for ever clamouring. "I will give you Rest." What is this Rest which, when bestowed, demonstrates the Deity of the Giver? Guided by the context before us we answer first, It is—

## I. THE REST OF A FINISHED WORK

In verse 4 we read: "God did rest the seventh day from all His works," which not only typifies but, rightly understood, includes by anticipation the Redemption rest that followed. Perhaps in verse 10 there is a direct reference to the Redeemer in the words, "He that is entered into His rest (viz., Christ). He also hath ceased from His own works as God did from His." <sup>1</sup>

However this may be, certain it is that it is upon the finished work of Christ, the work of Him "Who came to finish transgression and to make an end of sin," and upon that alone that the believer rests, rests from the stings of an accusing conscience, rests for pardon and for peace—

"Upon a life I did not live,  
Upon a death I did not die,  
Another's life, another's death,  
I stake my whole eternity."

But the rest of God, though it begins with the finished work of redemption, passes on stage after stage into the blessed results which that redemption secures. And following still the guidance of the chapter we say that this rest of God is—

## II. THE REST OF AN EVICTED FOE

The rest of Canaan was the rest of eviction and victory. Israel entered the land with the promise

<sup>1</sup> See Ebrard, *in loco*.

sounding in their ears: "He shall thrust out the enemy from before thee: and shall say, Destroy them" (Deut. xxxiii. 27). Ever and again they were reminded that rest could only be enjoyed on condition of the expulsion of the foe. If in any wise they should be tempted to make alliance with their enemies, then should those enemies become "snares and traps to them, scourges in their sides and thorns in their eyes" (Joshua xxiii. 13). How sadly this warning was needed the subsequent history of the chosen nation too plainly shows. It was their sin that they did not utterly drive out the inhabitants of the land (Judges i. 27-36; ii. 20-23), although, as in the case of Caleb (Joshua xiv. 6-15, and Judges i. 20), there were noble exceptions to the general rule of faintness and failure. The results of their sin and failure are seen in the condition of Judæa to-day. As I passed through it lately it seemed to me that in its dearth and desolation it answered rather to the sad description of Deuteronomy: "The whole land thereof is brimstone, and salt, and burning," it is "not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein" (Deut. xxix. 23), than to the ancient vision of a land flowing with milk and honey.

Let us beware lest by our unbelief and disobedience we, like Israel of old, should forfeit our inheritance. Under our Joshua too, expulsion, not suppression, is the order of the day: "What saith the Scripture?



Cast out (not imprison) the bondwoman and her son" (Gal. iv. 30), *i.e.* the carnality of the soul and the legality to which we are so prone that causes it. What though these troublers of our peace hover on the horizon and are ever ready to return? What though when the unclean devil has been cast out, there is ever need to watch and pray, lest in some subtler and more dangerous form, transformed perhaps as an angel of light, he may again plot the soul's undoing? Still, though on our frontiers the danger signals ever flame, yet it remains true that so far and so long as we abide in Christ and Christ in us, so far and so long rest and victory are ours.

"Ah, those sins, those sins that hinder  
Christ and you from being One."

Are you willing to part with them—willing to let them go? Never till then can you enjoy the fulness of the heavenly rest, for it is not only the rest of an evicted foe, it is—

### III. THE REST OF DIVINE UNION

Even in Old Testament times this rest was in some measure understood. It is a great mistake to suppose that the enlightened Israelite of Joshua's day looked only for temporal blessings in the conquest of the land. No doubt to possess the goodly heritage was in itself a prize to win, but there was something more. To the devout in Israel the thought of the land carried with it the thought of a settled abode

for the tabernacle of God. They looked upon the land as the place of privilege because there, undisturbed, they hoped to dwell with God and God with them. It was the glory and pride of the Jew that "in Judah was God known. His Name was great in Israel. At Salem was His tabernacle and His dwelling in Zion" (Ps. lxxvi. 1, 2). Psalms like the one hundred and thirty-second furnish ample warrant for their confidence: "The Lord hath chosen Zion, He hath longed for her. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell, for I have a delight therein" (Ps. cxxxii. 13, 14; P.B.V.). Thus, even in the dim grey twilight of the earlier dispensation, union with God was still the longing, yes, and the actual experience of the worshipper who could make the utterance of David his own: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to enquire in His Temple" (Ps. xxvii. 4). When, however, we translate this privilege into New Testament experience, we see in it deeper possibilities than could be known to Israel of old. How shall we describe the manifold features that characterise this union with the GOD of REST? The first, the fundamental aspect of it is—

#### IV. THE REST OF AN YIELDED WILL

It is almost a commonplace to say it. But it needs constant saying, for in the neglect of this sub-

mission of the will lies the true reason of all the world's unrest. To say from the heart "Not my will but thine be done" is to cover all our case. It is the secret of unchanging rest. How can we be at rest if we do not come into harmony with God? To be out of tune with God would be torture in heaven, and in spite of all disguises it is this that makes men's hell on earth. Until the will is yielded peace is sought in vain. Said Dr. Payson in his closing years: "I have found happiness since I have lost my will." He had been taught how to lose his will in Christ's "and by the loss be free." Yes, we have a responsibility. We are not automata—

"Our wills are ours, we know not how,  
Our wills are ours to make them Thine."

But again this rest of God is—

## V. THE REST OF A SATISFIED AFFECTION

It is one of the saddest features of the day that even men who come to God for salvation will go somewhere else for pleasure. This love of pleasure is the curse of the hour. It infects the Church and dominates the world. The only way to remedy it is to show men that true satisfaction is in Christ. How is it with you? Is there one place where you are sure of a welcome? Is there one heart that beats in response to yours? Is there one refuge to which you can turn when the sorrows of life overwhelm you? Is there one Hand ever willing to help and

strengthen you ? In the day of your sorrow and perplexity where do you turn for rest ?

“ Jesu is in my heart : His sacred Name  
 Is deeply carved there : but the other week  
 A great affliction broke the little frame  
 Ev’n all to pieces : which I went to seek.  
 And first I found the corner where was I,  
 After, where E S, and next where U was graved.  
 When I had got these parcels, instantly  
 I sat me down to spell them, and perceived  
 That to my broken heart He was *I ease you,*  
 And to my whole is JESU.” .

So sweetly sings George Herbert. How far is his experience yours ?

Again the rest of God is—

## VI. THE REST OF HARMONIOUS ACTION

The rest to which we are invited is not a Buddhist Nirvana. It is not an extinction of all desire for good or ill. The rest of God is not the rest of the sepulchre or the stone ; it is the rest of a perpetual energy, yet without effort, without pain. The rest of Christ is not the rest of the stagnant pool ; it is the rest of the gliding stream moving so swiftly that you almost think it still. “ My Father worketh hitherto and I work.” The Father’s sabbatic rest was not interrupted by movement nor will ours be. “ As the revolution of the heavens, which is a motion in rest and a rest in motion, changeth not place though running still,” so to rest in GOD is to rest



in the midst of service ; nay, that rest of union with Him is the secret of the believer's usefulness and power. When the Great Worker takes up His abode within, then heart friction ceases, worry is soothed away, labour itself is restful, and we can work and rest and rest and work, perhaps even to the end, until at length the rest begun on earth loses itself like the river in the ocean in—

#### VII. THE REST OF AN ETERNAL SABBATH IN HEAVEN

“What,” asked a friend of William Wilberforce, “is your idea of heaven ?” He answered, “Love.” “And what,” said the questioner, turning to Robert Hall, always a sufferer, “is yours ?” “Mine,” he answered, “is REST.” Both were right, for “There,” as Augustine says, “we shall rest and gaze ; we shall gaze and love, we shall love and praise. (*‘Ibi vacabimus et videbimus ; videbimus et amabimus ; amabimus et laudabimus.’*)” “There the wicked cease from troubling and there the weary are at rest.” “There beyond these voices there is Peace.” “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth, saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours and their works do follow them” (Rev. xiv. 13). “O blessed tranquillity where there is always peace ! O healthful City whereof the inhabitant never says I am sick ! O fortunate land where all are kings ! O most holy where all are

priests." "We shall see His Face and His Name shall be upon our foreheads."

There is one thing more. *This rest of God is to be entered now.* "We which have believed *do* enter into rest." "Faith, not death, is the entrance into God's rest." A little faith will bring you to heaven, but great faith will bring heaven to you. Let us therefore fear—fear lest like Israel of old we should fail of the Promises through unbelief. Let us not doubt the rest of the Finished Work; let us not stagger at the rest of the Evicted Foe; let us not shrink from the rest of the Divine Union, and so in God's infinite grace we shall not come short at last of the eternal "rest that remaineth for the people of God."

"Jesu, in mercy bring us  
To that dear land of rest,  
Who art with God the Father,  
And Spirit ever blest." Amen.

## CHAPTER II

### ITS WARRANT : THE PROMISES

“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises : that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”—2 PETER i. 4.

“EXCEEDING great and precious promises.” If we read from the second verse we are put into possession of the context. Peter is saluting those who have obtained “like precious faith with him,” and he says, “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue : whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises.” We are told that knowledge is power, and sure I am that it is true in spiritual things as well as in things which pertain to this life. It is true in this life. Some years ago a spendthrift heir ran through his property, wasted his substance, and ended his days in the workhouse. His son succeeded to the encumbered inheritance, found a copper mine on the estate, paid off his debts,

and now lives in his father's house in affluence. The mine was there all the while, but the former owner did not know it. If he had but known, he would have been a rich man. Knowledge is power. How rich we should be as Christians if we only knew experimentally the treasures which there are for us in Jesus Christ our Lord. I fear it is true in a measure of us all, that we are starving in the midst of plenty, poverty-stricken when we might be millionaires in grace, living on a penny a day when we might be drawing from the inexhaustible resources of the living God. Now it is to the "exceeding great and precious promises,"—the Divine treasures which exhibit these resources—that the Apostle draws our attention. In the Greek the words literally rendered are "the greatest promises." Why are these promises so great and precious? First—

#### I. THEY ARE GREAT BECAUSE OF THE SOURCE FROM WHICH THEY COME

These promises flow from the highest source, they flow from Him, Who is the fountain of supply to all His people. They are great because they are bestowed upon us by a great God. Let us have great thoughts of God. We often dishonour Him by expecting so little from Him. When Alexander the Great, distributing the spoils of war, allotted to one of his generals a valuable prize, some one

standing by remarked, "Those cities are too great a gift for Parmenio to receive." "They may be too great for him to receive," replied the king, "but they are not too great for Alexander to give." Alexander was a great king and he gave according to his greatness. He gave "according to the estate of the king" (Esther ii. 18). If so, what may we not expect from the King of kings? It is impossible to expect too much from Him.

"Thou art coming to a King,  
Large petitions with thee bring."

But notice, secondly—

## II. THE PROMISES ARE GREAT BECAUSE OF THEIR INTRINSIC CHARACTER

How can they be described? First of all they are *free*. "Whereby are *given* unto us." They are not earned, still less can they be deserved, but they are freely bestowed—free as the sunshine, free as the air. These great announcements of the mercy of God are offered without money and without price, they are within the reach of the humblest and feeblest believer, and since they are so there is no excuse for any man remaining destitute of them. He has but to put in his claim to enjoy them, and they are his. Further, these promises are not only free, but they are *full*, they are wonderfully complete.



## HAVE YOU EVER MADE A LIST OF THEM

putting your needs on one side and the promises on the other? There is such a list in the little book which General Gordon used always to carry about with him, and which he presented to each member of the Cabinet, before he took his last and fatal journey to the Soudan—"Clarke's Scripture Promises." It is said that there is an antidote somewhere for every poison in the world. I do not know how true that may be, but I am sure that in the field of Scripture there is an antidote for the venom of every sorrow and the poison of every sin. If we would only put our finger upon the promises we should find our difficulties anticipated and our sorrows met.

## LISTEN TO A FEW OF THEM

Are you guilty? "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee" (Isa. xlv. 22). Are you in sorrow? "It is I; be not afraid" (Matt. xiv. 27). "He will give unto you the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isa. lxi. 3). Are you perplexed? "The Lord shall guide thee continually" (Isa. lviii. 11). "I will guide thee with mine eye" (Ps. xxxii. 8). Are you poor? "My God shall supply all your need according to

His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Are you sinful, defiled, and polluted? "From all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you" (Ezek. xxxvi. 25). Are you hard, cold, dead, and indifferent? "I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh" (Ezek. xi. 19). Are you lonely, do you travel in a lonely path through this wilderness world? "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isa. xli. 10). Are you weak? "Out of weakness you shall be made strong" (Heb. xi. 34).

ARE YOU IN STRAITS SUCH AS NO MAN HAS  
EVER BEEN IN BEFORE

Listen to the promise. "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (Jer. xxxiii. 3). "Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth: shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert" (Isa. xliii. 19). If nothing like your trouble has ever been known before, God will do something new to meet your special case. The fact is every sorrow is an opportunity for us to discover some new grace in Christ and some new meaning in the promises which are intended to meet and do meet all the vicissitudes of human life. Again, the

promises are great not only because they are free and full, but because they are *faithful*. Human promises sound very well in the making, their failure, alas, is too often in the performance. As for Satan's promises they are "like fowlers' baits—meant not to feed but to ensnare" the soul. Happy are they who undeceived by either turn to rely on the promises of Jesus Christ.

### HE IS ABSOLUTELY TRUSTWORTHY

"I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day" (2 Tim. i. 12). "All the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us" (2 Cor. i. 20). Is it not high time we trusted Him a little more? "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man," says the prophet, "and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord" (Jer. xvii. 5). Yet how ready we are to trust in man. People say it is hard to trust in God, Whom they have never seen, and yet they do not find it hard to trust in men whom they have never seen. Without such trust society could not hold together. Men trust each other—trust, for instance, the engine-driver of a train whom they have never seen, and yet they say it is so difficult for them to trust in God. Why is it difficult? Because the heart of man is estranged from God. Unbelief is not an infirmity

or a weakness to be condoned and excused, it is a malignant sin? It is the index of a rebellious heart. It charges God with falsehood. "He that believeth not God hath *made him a liar*; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son" (1 John v. 10). Men forget that there is one thing God cannot do; He can create a world but He "cannot lie!" Shall we not trust Him, lean our weight upon Him? Dr. John Paton of the New Hebrides, in his wonderful missionary story, gives us—

#### A STRIKING DEFINITION OF FAITH

The natives had no word for faith; when they wished to say they did not *believe* a report, they said they did not *hear* it, by which they meant that though they heard it they gave no heed to it. That, however, was not a sufficient definition of faith. Many passages, such as "Faith cometh by hearing," would be impossible of translation by such means, and the good missionary prayed and pondered, asking God to "supply the missing link." One day as he was anxiously weighing the matter over at home an intelligent native entered and the missionary thought he would make another trial. "He sat upon an ordinary chair, his feet resting on the floor," and he asked the native, "What am I doing now?" The native replied, "Koikœ ana, missi"—"You are *sitting* down, missionary."

“And what am I doing now?” said Dr. Paton, taking his feet off the floor and leaning back in the easy-chair with both feet on the lower rail. Immediately the man replied, “Fakarongrongo, missi,” meaning “you are *leaning wholly* or *all your weight*, missionary.” “That’s it,” shouted the missionary with an exultant cry. His prayer was answered. Yes. To trust is to lean all your weight. Oh, to lean all our weight upon God, to venture our whole being on the truth of His promises. They will bear us up; they have borne the weight of hundreds of thousands before to-day. Testimonies can be given from living saints and from thousands who have passed through the dark valley, that even in the supreme hour “God was faithful who had promised.” Lastly—

### III. THESE PROMISES ARE GREAT BECAUSE OF THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH THEY ARE GIVEN

“That by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature; having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” Here is a twofold purpose; the negative and positive sides of Christian life are given here. First—

#### THE NEGATIVE SIDE

Why are the promises given? They are given to furnish us with a way of escape from sin. “Having

*escaped* the corruption which is in the world through lust." And where is lust or evil desire ? Not in the outward, material world. Sinful lusts are found in human hearts. This verse is a promise of deliverance from the corruption of the heart. "*Having escaped.*" A wonderful escape indeed to be set free from the workings of that corrupt heart that has so often brought us into danger and difficulty. There is no real evil but sin. Sorrows, troubles, and trials are not necessarily evils after all—the only real evil is sin. It is sin that darkens our souls and covers us with shame ; it is sin that separates men from God. "Who shall separate us from the love of God ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword ? . . . I am persuaded that neither death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord " (Rom. viii. 35, 38, 39). None of these things can separate us ; it is sin alone that separates men from God. We shall never be free from temptation to sin, but we may escape its corruption. What a deliverance ! Then there is—

#### THE POSITIVE SIDE

"That by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature."



“Partakers of the divine nature.” What does it mean? Of course, it does not mean that we can share the divine attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence, but it does mean that we may partake of the moral nature of God. Marvellous as it is, it is the very proclamation of the Gospel. Are we not told that we are to be partakers of Christ and of the Holy Ghost? Are we not “called to the fellowship of God’s Son, Jesus Christ our Lord?” Are we not “born of God”? Are we not predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, called to “eat His flesh and drink His blood and to be made one with Christ and Christ with us?” To eat the flesh is to partake of the nature, to drink the blood is to share in the life. To eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ is to be one with Him and He with us. “Ye see your calling, brethren.” Does some one ask, “What is the Divine nature?” The answer is “God is love.” With that nature you can achieve the impossible—you can

### LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

Are you aware that that is a Christian command? Have you ever thought it possible? Or, do you think that Christ is like the Roman Emperor Caligula, who wrote his statutes so high up that the people could not read them, and then punished them for disobedience to them. No, “His commandments

are not grievous." You must not make Him out a hard Master. It was the "slothful and wicked servant" that said his master was "hard, reaping where he had not sown, and gathering where he had not strawed." You say "I cannot do it." I know you cannot, but—

### CHRIST IN YOU CAN

Christ loved his enemies when He was upon earth, and prayed, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." What we want is the indwelling of God. There is no other remedy for the sins and miseries of men. Your own strength is worthless, all the prayers and ceremonies and observances of religion, *unless they bring Christ on to the field*, are worthless. But hear the promise: "I will dwell in them and walk in them, I will be their God and they shall be my people" (2 Cor. vi. 16). Have we obtained these precious promises? It is "not the grapes on the vine that refresh us but the grapes pressed into the cup." It is not the promises in the Bible but the promises meditated upon, the promises appropriated, that bring us peace. Shall we then make more use of the promises, shall we "kneel down on the promises," shall we grasp the promises, shall we go up and possess the promises? There is the goodly land flowing with milk and honey, the land of rest; have you gone in to possess it yet? Here is your warrant, go in and

take possession and make the land your own.  
Amen.

“Standing on the promises that cannot fail,  
When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,  
By the living word of God I shall prevail,  
Standing on the promises of God.”

•

## CHAPTER III

### ITS MARKS : FREEDOM (I)

“Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.”—ACTS xii. 5.

“WHICH things are an allegory.” There are prisons and prisons. If we could read each other’s hearts, I am afraid we should find many a disciple needing deliverance to-day almost as much as Peter did on this memorable occasion. I want to look at this story as a picture of the deliverance which God still works for His own people in their time of need. Notice first—

#### I. THE PRISONER

Who was he? and what was his condition? Well, he was—

#### A CHRISTIAN IN DANGER

Peter was in Herod’s power, that is, he was in Satan’s power, for Herod was Satan’s instrument. “We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers” (Eph. vi. 12). It is an awful reflection that Satan can use not only

wicked men but sometimes even good men to oppress Christ's servants. If the secret history of the Church were written many such instances would be recorded. Let suffering saints trodden under some insolent Herod's heel remember Peter and be comforted.

Further, Peter was *in the dark*. What ! you say—

### A CHRISTIAN IN THE DARK ?

Yes ! but remember there are different kinds of darkness. There is the darkness of sin and there is the darkness of suffering. Peter's was the darkness of suffering. There is a special promise for that kind of darkness. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light ? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and stay upon his GOD" (Isa. l. 10). As a father might say to his children on a journey, "When you come to a tunnel, sit still till you are through," or, as I have sometimes said to my fellow-passengers in a tunnel, "Look up and you will find light from above." Yes, "When I sit in darkness the Lord shall be a light to me" (Micah vii. 8). In short, as Dorothea Trudel used to say, "We may sit in darkness provided the darkness does not sit in us." Still we cannot limit the great salvation. Let the sadness be the gloom of sorrow or of sin, or what it may, at Christ's approach the darkness turns to day.

Further, this deliverance was granted to

### A CHRISTIAN ASLEEP

Peter was asleep. That was to his credit personally. Thank God he could sleep in such circumstances. It was the night before his execution, but he was sleeping as calmly as a child on its mother's breast. How was it that he was so composed ? When Sir Walter Raleigh was about to lay his head upon the block he turned to the executioner and said, "My friend, it matters little how the head lies so long as the heart is right." Yes,

"Jesus can make a dying bed  
As soft as downy pillows are."

That was the secret of Peter's tranquillity. His heart was right. But Peter's sleep on the eve of his execution is a picture of a very different sort of sleep too. Is it not a sad reflection that many souls still are both in prison and asleep ? They are prisoners but they are unconscious of the fact. They imagine themselves very wide awake, and so they are in worldly matters ; but as regards spiritual things they are in the profoundest slumber. Not perhaps that they are not active. Wonderful things can be done in sleep. People can walk and talk in their sleep. I am afraid there are many spiritual somnambulists, people who talk and work but are sound asleep all the while. They are sound enough in doctrine but they are also *sound asleep*. Some



men, it has been well said, use the doctrines of the Gospel as a man does his bed-clothes—they wrap themselves up in them, and you hear no more about them. How is it with us? Are any of us asleep? “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from *among* the dead, and Christ shall give thee light” (Eph. v. 14). Again, this deliverance came to Peter as—

### A CHRISTIAN IN CHAINS

He was not only asleep, he was bound between two soldiers, and his guards must answer for him with their lives. It seemed a hopeless case enough. There were the fetters and the foes and the fortress. How could he escape? There were *the fetters*—what are they? Christian, you know what they are—the chains of your besetting sin, the chains of evil habit, the chains of lust and pride and worldly conformity and the like. Have you been set free from these? And then still subtler bonds, silken and slender, almost invisible sometimes—the love of praise, the love of ease, the love of gold, what are these? Are these not fetters? Then *the foes*, the guards who stand sentry at the gates—are they not real? Sometimes in this struggle to escape from prison a man’s foes are “they of his own household” (Matt. x. 36). The old companions, the worldly friends, yes, they may be foes indeed. Last, not least, *the fortress*, the great wall of circumstance that hems you round, the circle in which you move. As we think of

these things we ask, Are any of us really free? Like the Jews of old who said to Christ, "We are Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man." We may think we are, but are we? Christ alone can say, but He has said, "If the Son shall make you free ye shall be free indeed" (John viii. 36).

## II. THE PRAYER

"Peter was kept in prison"—yes, but there was something more: "Prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him." "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of," or that the Church dreams of either, for that matter. When this prayer was answered, the Church could not believe it true, and as for Peter, he thought it was a dream. After all, who can blame him? "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion we were like them that dream" (Ps. cxxvi. 1).

And yet though unbelief mingled with the Church's prayers, we may all take a lesson from that prayer-meeting. If we want souls prayed out of prison we must learn how to pray. There were three things about it that characterise prevailing prayer. The first was *unity*—the Church met together. Like Daniel of old (Dan. ii. 17, 18) the early Church believed in the power of—

### UNITED

prayer. There were no dissentients, they were of

one heart and of one soul. Their prayer meeting was held at "the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark" (ver. 12). It may be that the "upper room" of Acts i. was there. Evidently this house was a sort of centre and was given up to Christ's service.

Secondly, there was *intensity*. The word in the Greek, rendered "without ceasing," means literally "stretched out." Stretched out prayer was made. One great reason why our prayers do not prevail is that they are not stretched out, they are not—

#### INTENSE

There was an agony in these people's prayers—they could not let God alone, their whole soul was in their petition. Though the case seemed hopeless and though they could not believe the answer when it came, still the Spirit of God constrained them to urge their request. Their prayer too was—

#### DEFINITE

"Generalities are the death of prayer." There are some prayers that seem to "aim at nothing and hit it." Such prayers are the death of prayer-meetings. These people had something to pray for. They knew what they wanted and they asked for it. I should like to have been at that meeting. When these three marks, unity, intensity, definiteness, are found in

our prayer-meetings, they will succeed as this did.

### III. THE PRESERVATION

How was prayer answered for Peter, and when ? Not till the last moment. Peter was *at the last extremity* ; a few hours more and all would have been over ; he was to have been executed in the sight of all men the very next day. God's help came late ; it often does, but it never comes too late. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." Christ comes in the fourth watch—in the darkest hour, but it is darkest just before the dawn. So it was here, at the supreme moment Christ intervened. "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God" (Ps. cxlvi. 5).

"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations" (2 Pet. ii. 9). He has many resources. Mark the stages in His procedure here.

#### LIGHT

first. "A light shined in the prison" (ver. 7). Light "to make the darkness visible ;" light to show the prison cell, to let you see the poor confined imprisoned life that has been yours. Light to illumine, and light to cheer ; to give a hope of better things ; to show you escape is possible ; above all to reveal the angel of the covenant standing at your side. A word can do it. "God said, Let there be

light, and there was light." With the light comes—

#### LEADING

Listen: "Arise up quickly," and "his chains fell off from his hands" (ver. 7). Yes, the fetters were gone, but he was not free yet. He must pass the foes and escape the fortress. "Follow ME." What a crisis it was! Upon obedience to that call his life, his liberty, his all depended. Half mechanically, like the man in the dream he thought he was, Peter responded. But you and I cannot respond mechanically. It must be an intelligent following, and it will need many a heart-searching to be obedient to the Heavenly Vision. But it must be done or there can be no—

#### LIBERTY

for you and me. Yet as you follow be of good cheer, liberty is nigh. Barrier after barrier yields before the angel's noiseless touch—the iron gate most formidable of all opens of its own accord, and, saved with a wonderful salvation, the prisoner is free.

Saints in prison or saints set free, in which category are we found? Imprisoned Peters are of little use to God. Asleep, in danger, in the dark, in chains, how can He make you a blessing to the world? If not for your own sake then for the sake of others, rest not content until like Peter you are

#### OUT OF PRISON

Amen.

## CHAPTER IV

### ITS MARKS : FREEDOM (II)

ST. LUKE xiii. 10-17.

CHRIST's miracles are all parables. No wonder that with Him healing and preaching went hand in hand. His works are living illustrations of the meaning of His words. Here in the story of the cure of the woman with the spirit of infirmity is an assurance of the power of Him who still goes about doing good, healing all that are oppressed of the devil, for God is with Him, and He Himself is very God. In pondering the story of this poor woman's cure let us consider first—

#### THE NEED OF THE CURE

She was *bound*. Our Lord describes her as one “whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years.” The connection of sickness and suffering with Satanic agency is very mysterious; that there is some such connection cannot be doubted, were it only from the words of our Lord on this occasion, in which He distinctly traces the sickness of the poor sufferer to the malice of the great enemy. That Satan has, when it is permitted him, a power over the bodies



of men, is plainly stated again and again in Scripture, as, for instance, in the case of Job ; but how far since the Atonement on Calvary he is still able to wield it, is another question. One thing, at any rate, is certain—there are only too many sufferers to-day who are still bound hand and foot by Satan, if not by physical ailments, yet certainly by spiritual sicknesses. What shall we say of those who are fast bound in misery and iron by the chains of passion and of evil habit, of sinful tempers and inclinations ? These are objects of the Saviour's pity, and they need the exercise of His power as truly as this poor victim of whom we read to-day.

I notice further, that this poor woman was *bent*. She was bowed down, she “could in no wise lift up herself,” she was not straight, and had very little hope of ever becoming so. Is there no parallel to this condition in the case of spiritual sufferers still ? What are these little crookednesses in conduct and in life which adhere so closely to the character ? Do we always stand upright ? Is our life such as will bear the closest inspection ? Or is there anything bent double anywhere in our souls or in our ways of acting ? Maybe we are ready to say that that which is crooked cannot be made straight ; but with this instance of Christ's power before us, let such an unbelieving utterance be put to silence. Christ is able to straighten us out, and make our lives such as shall manifest to all men that we are

under the guidance of that Spirit Whose "fruit is goodness and righteousness and truth."

Once more, this poor soul was *burdened* as well as bound and bent. She was burdened even with the weight of years; she had now been eighteen years in this case. But she was burdened still more with the weight of her infirmities. She could hardly lift her eyes from the ground she walked on. The derivation of the Greek word for man (*ἄνθρωπος*) is probably upward looking, but this poor creature did not answer to the description of the race. I fear there are too many like her. Occupied with the cares and pleasures of earth, they have no eyes for heaven. Like the man with the muck-rake they are busy gathering together the straws and dust off the floor, but are wholly regardless of the bright crowns held out above them.

"Burdened and bowed." Yes, it is a true account of thousands still, whether in heathen or in Christian lands.

The doubting, the desponding, the worldly-minded, each carrying their own burden, may see in this poor sufferer a picture of themselves. Would that, like her, they would bring their sorrows to the Saviour's feet. For this woman was—I cannot doubt—a *believer*. There are, at any rate, two statements in the narrative which give colour to the belief that she was really living up to the light she had.

First, observe, we find her in the synagogue. How

easily she might have made an excuse for absence ! It would have been no mere subterfuge to plead her physical weakness as a reason for absenting herself from the house of God. There are many who do so on far lighter grounds than she ; but she was in her place, in the assembly where, it may be, the hale and hearty were often conspicuous by their absence. Her love for the Courts of the Lord—although not conclusive evidence that she was Christ's—is yet so much in her favour. How much may those miss who neglect the public worship of the Sabbath day ! There are still advents of Christ to be looked for ; if it were not so, our public worship would be in vain. Christ still comes and fixes a compassionate eye upon the weakest who desire His blessing.

Again, our Lord spoke of this woman as a daughter of Abraham. “Ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham ? ” &c. We know indeed that to be a son or daughter of Abraham was not in itself a proof of possessing the faith of Abraham ; it is possible to have a name to live and yet be dead. “Think not to say within yourselves,” said John the Baptist to the Pharisees, “we have Abraham to our father : for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.” And yet it remains true that this designation seems in our Lord's lips to point to something more than the mere profession of Jehovah's Name. Charitably, at any rate, we may hope that this woman was a

daughter of Abraham, not only by natural descent, but because she was a child of faith, and walked in the footsteps of him whose honourable distinction is that he is called the Father of the Faithful.

We have seen the need : let us notice—

#### THE NATURE OF THE CURE

*It was immediate.* “Immediately she was made straight.” What power was here ! It is nothing with Christ to heal in many days or few. He can abridge the tedious delays and slow processes of cure.

Let us beware that we are not found limiting the Holy One of Israel. He shall work and who shall let it. Immediately she was made straight. There is no need for you to continue in your sins for another hour. Christ is able to set you free, and that immediately. What is impossible with men is possible with God.

Further, I notice *the cure was conscious*. The poor warped and distorted frame sprang into symmetry and conscious ease. For the first time for eighteen years she was able to lift her face upwards to God and heaven. No wonder that from her lips there burst the song of praise. When Christ does a work in us He will know it, and we shall know it too. There will be a consciousness of release from the chains of besetting sin, and the joy of freedom will fill our hearts and lips with praise.

Also, *this cure was complete*. She was made straight. There was no more need of crutch or stick. Like the lame beggar in later days at the gate of the Temple, she stood erect, restored not only to convalescence, but to health. Happy the man who takes Christ's uttermost salvation, and finds in actual experience that God is "able to make him stand."

#### THE MEANS OF THE CURE

deserve attention. Christ's miracles were wrought in various ways, as if to teach us that we must not shut Him up to one mode of action, that He does as He pleases, and that His grace is not in the means He uses but in Himself, the Giver. But here we read of two instrumentalities employed.

The cure was effected, first, *by His Word*. Jesus addressed her, He spoke to her the word of power: "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity." How blessed to know that the same power is in the Saviour's Word to-day. "He sent His Word and healed them, and they were delivered from their destructions" (Ps. cv. 20). The leaves of this tree are still for the healing of the nations. Still through the Word read and preached the delivering power of the Spirit is put forth, and dead souls rise into newness of life, and they which are lame are healed.

Again we see that it was *by His touch* that Jesus worked the cure. Contact is needed. "He laid His

hands on her." It is the touch of Christ that banishes disease, whether from soul or body. It is the very meaning of the Incarnation, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." He took human nature that He might sanctify it and set it free; that by His Spirit He might take up His abode again in millions of believing hearts and cure our souls of whatsoever disease they have.

#### THE EFFECTS OF THE CURE

must not be overlooked. We should have been ready to say that the effect of such a cure could only be gratitude and praise, and this was indeed the case with the poor-woman herself, for forthwith she glorified God, but it was not the only result of this miracle of power.

It was immediately followed by *opposition*. The ruler of the synagogue complained that the work had been wrought upon the Sabbath, forgetting that it was precisely for such works—the works of healing, refreshing, and strengthening men's bodies and souls—that the Sabbath was instituted. The work of the Healer is essentially Sabbath work. But prejudice and envy are never at a loss for the pretext of attack. It would almost seem as if Satan had transferred his malignity from the poor woman to the ruler of the synagogue. It has been suggested that perhaps his conscience smote him with the remembrance of some crookedness of his own. Evil-



doers cannot endure to see rectitude in others, for it condemns themselves. Wherever Christ is really at work there we may be sure before long to see signs of the adversary's presence ; he dogs the steps of Christ, and thwarts and hinders Him to the utmost of his power. But what matter, his malice is vain. Therefore let no one engaged in Christian work be discouraged because with open doors there are many adversaries. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master and the servant his Lord.

But if this effect of the miracle is lamentable, the general results were all that could be desired. There was *joy among the people*. "All the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him." Whatever the Scribes and Pharisees might say, the people felt that in Christ they had a Friend ; and doubtless on this and many another occasion the glad tidings went forth that a great Prophet had risen up among them, and that God had visited His people.

Finally, and above all, the ultimate result achieved was *the glory of God*. It was the glory of God that the poor sufferer sang as soon as she was restored to health, and it is the glory of God, let us be well assured, that is advanced to-day as much as in the days of old when withered crooked hearts experience His power. May that power be ours for the same great Master's sake, Amen.

## CHAPTER V

### ITS MARKS : FRESHNESS

“All my fresh springs are in Thee.”—Ps. lxxxvii. 7.

WE have heard of “sermons in stones, and books in running brooks,” but, so far as I know, no one as yet has written of the Gospel in a Geyser. I hope, however, to be able to make it clear that geysers are not to be left out of our programme of instruction, and that there are lessons worth learning from foaming fountains as well as babbling brooks. The special geyser of this chapter rejoices in the name of Old Faithful, and I must begin by introducing him and the wonderful company of geysers of which he is such a distinguished member to the reader. Geysers are, of course, tolerably familiar phenomena to most of us. We have heard of the Great Geyser of Iceland, and of the geysers of New Zealand, but, until very recent years, little or nothing was known by the outside world of the wonders of the region of which Old Faithful is so remarkable a monument.

The first authentic information regarding the great natural wonders of the district now known as the

Yellowstone Park (the great national park of America) was due to a prospecting party under the leadership of Captain W. De Lacy, who, in 1863, visited the Lower Geyser Basin. Hunters and trappers, notably one trapper named Coulter, had, indeed, brought back strange reports of lakes of burning pitch and land on fire, &c., but trappers were proverbially given to romancing, and but little credence was given to their stories. De Lacy's report, though startling in its interest, seems to have attracted but little attention, and it was not till the year 1870 that a large party, composed of leading citizens of Montana, under the guidance of General Washburn, was formally organised to explore the country.

Then, indeed, a world of marvels broke upon the sceptical and astonished gaze of the explorers. They found themselves in a tract of country whose natural features are not to be paralleled in any quarter of the globe. The greater part of the area now known as the Yellowstone Park is the scene of dying but yet powerful volcanic action. "It is not altogether without reason," says a recent writer, "that those who dwell in the vicinity of the Yellowstone National Park have enthusiastically termed it 'Wonderland.' Within its boundaries—sixty-one miles long by fifty-three broad—there are over 10,000 active geysers, hot springs, fumaroles, solfataras, salses, and boiling pools. Sulphur mountains, an obsidian (volcanic glass) mountain, a mud volcano, and various other

remarkable phenomena add to the curiosity of this extraordinary region."

The experiences of the exploring party of 1870 were given to the world in the pages of an American magazine, and constitute one of the most thrilling narratives of adventure and discovery ever written. The sufferings and narrow escape from death of one of their party, Mr. Evarts, who wandered from the trail and was lost for thirty-seven days in the wilderness, added an absorbing but painful interest to their story. General attention to the newly-found Wonderland was now aroused, and it was not long before an Act of Congress was passed setting apart this large tract of land in the territories of Montana and Wyoming as "a public park or pleasure ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people." Since then hotels have been built, a regular system of transportation organised, and the park is now visited annually by thousands of persons from all parts of the country. Among these pilgrims my friend and myself some years ago found ourselves numbered, and in the lines which follow I record the impressions of personal experience.

And here a difficulty presents itself. It cannot be denied that the impression left upon the mind is not altogether encouraging. On the contrary, the first effect is to depress. One seems to be treading upon the burnt-out ashes of a ruined world, upon the lava plains of another Herculaneum and Pompeii,

or to have come just too late to witness the overthrow of some modern Sodom and Gomorrah. Your way lies through pine forests, seared and blackened by recent fires, and through the geyser basin with its columns of steam, its subterranean rumblings, its hissing craters, and bubbling springs. It would almost seem as if Hell opened her mouth in grim reality on these sulphureous plains, and from a thousand orifices poured forth the vapour and smoke of her hidden fires. There are, however, beauties of the most exquisite kind side by side with these dark and depressing surroundings. Not only are the terrace formations—(over which unceasingly the heated waters flow) rising, as they do, tier above tier, as if designed and built by the hand of man—most striking and interesting, but “the colours that tinge the edges of some craters themselves, and stain the courses of the streams that they send forth, are indescribably beautiful. The snowy whiteness of the grounding is relieved by dainty buffs, pale pinks, and softest écrus, deep yellows shot with brown, orange streaked with vermillion or straying into crimson, chocolate merging into black and interlined with lemon—by colours, in fact, run riot, and all glistening wet beneath the clearest crystal water that, in the centre of the crater, deepens into the heavenliest blue.” Nor is this all. Although the general effect of this region of domes and craters is almost stupefying in its vaporous and unearthly

gloom, yet the vision of each separate geyser when in action has a vastly different influence on the spectator.

“Imagine the head of a valley, walled in by sombre hills, and threaded by a rushing stream. Patches of desert white alternating with clumps of pine trees fill the bottom. On all sides, issuing from amidst the foliage, dense columns of steam tower into the heavens; suddenly, as we cross the stream and mount the opposite bank, a vast monument of steam, followed by a stream of water 160 feet high, shoots up into the air. ‘There goes Old Faithful,’ exclaimed our guide, ‘the only reliable geyser in the park. You can always count on seeing him every sixty-five minutes.’ ”

This verdict, given by a traveller some years ago, I can confirm from personal observation. “Old Faithful” in the year we saw him still maintained his character, and, as I gazed at that sparkling column hurled into the air and falling like a “shower of diamonds” on the thirsty earth, it seemed to me that Old Faithful had a message for me which I must apply to myself, and then try to interpret for others.

What resemblance can there be between a geyser and a Christian? More, perhaps, than at first sight appears. It is an interesting fact that the Hebrew word for prophet might almost be rendered geyser—at least, it is derived from a root which means to bubble over, as if to remind us that the true pro-



phetic utterance is due to an inspiration from within, that it is a message given, not laboriously acquired ; and that the spirit of the true messenger (for a prophet is a *forth*-teller as well as a foreteller) is that of glad, joyous, irrepressible service far removed from the painful drudgery of the taskmaster and the slave.

With this clue to guide us, let us look a little at Christian life and testimony, as illustrated by our "Old Faithful" geyser. The first point I notice is its—

### I. ORIGIN

Whence does it arise ? A great deal has been said and written as to the origin of geysers. This is not the place to enter into a scientific investigation of their phenomena. One fact, at any rate, is obvious, and must be taken for granted. Whatever may be the explanation of the pressure which lifts the column of water in the air, it is certain that the outburst of this boiling stream is inseparably associated with the action of fire. Far below that seething cauldron an unseen flame is glowing. Let the fire die out, and the motive power is gone. The waters will fail, and the sparkling testimony to the outside world will be borne no more. Another fact which may not be disregarded lies close at hand. This motor power is lodged within the flowing fount. It depends upon no external aid. Its ebullition is not the result of a skilfully-devised machine ; its

waters are forced upwards, it is true, but it is by no artificial means—no elaborate contrivance, clumsy or clever, makes these waters lift up their voice on high. Their movement is the result of a pressure felt within—they move by “an inspiring power from within, not by a constraining power from without.”

Is there not here writ large the true account of Christian life and service? What is the true life of a Christian as it expresses itself in prayer but

“The motion of a hidden fire  
That trembles in the breast?”

The flame of devotion must be lighted from a heavenly source—a spark of the Divine Love, which is itself a consuming fire, must fall on us from above, or the soul will have no power to lift up itself at all. The fire that consumed the sacrifice in ancient days came forth from the Lord (Lev. ix. 24), and it must be even so with us if our sacrifice is to be accepted. We see, then, that Christian life and service may be compared to the geyser in their origin. But the comparison is also true of its—

## II. CHARACTERISTICS

Here at once we find the likeness of true service which we seek. This geyser is nothing if it be not *fervent*. Thrust your hand beneath the scalding, boiling waters if you dare; you can hardly do it and escape unscathed. These waters leave their mark. Do you and I? True service lacks an essential

element of success when it fails to glow. Does your heart burn within you? Alas, those heartless prayers and formal words! The cold, decorous profession which contents the world is an offence to Christ, and calls down the judgment of the skies. Christ's love should master us. It should be the ruling passion of our lives. It was for Paul. "The love of Christ constraineth me" (2 Cor. v. 14), he cries. When will that burning, shining life shame us into better things? It would seem as if a life on fire were the only life that God can greatly use.

But this fountain was not only fervent, it was *flowing*. It poured forth its volume so that all around were stirred and influenced. It is not enough that the fire should burn within us—it must make its presence known and felt. The outflow is the proof to others, if not to ourselves, of the working of the secret fire. This is the experience of which the Psalmist speaks, "While I was musing the fire kindled, and at the last I spake with my tongue" (Ps. xxxix. 4. P.B.V.).

First the meditation, which set the heart aglow, then the vehement flame which could not be repressed, and at last the burning words in which the pent-up feelings of the heart found their expression and relief. So with Jeremiah, "Then I said I would speak no more in His name. But His word was in my bones as a burning flame, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay" (Jer. xx. 9); and

Elihu (Job xxxii. 20), "I will speak, that I may be refreshed." This is the true reason for speaking. To speak to order is one thing ; to speak to relieve, not my conscience merely, but my heart, is quite another. That was good advice which an old minister gave to a young candidate for the holy office. "Don't be a minister," said he, "*if you can help it*. If you can't help it, if your spirit is pressed within you, then you may go forward without fear." Certain it is that it is only when the heart is overflowing that other hearts are reached ; nothing less will avail.

"Si vis me flere dolendum est primum ipsi tibi."

The simplest utterance warm from the heart will avail far more than the most convincing arguments which fall coldly from the lips. How necessary is the holy fire ! "As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil" (Isa. lxiv. 2). The hindrances to Christian service are far more internal than external. Let the hindrances within be melted down and swept away, and no matter what the external obstacles may be, the testimony will be borne, "for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. xii. 34).

It follows that the service of the Christian, like that of the geyser, should be *fresh*. However familiar the spectacle, the outburst of the geyser has an interest for the beholder, and however familiar the

truth that is spoken, the spontaneous utterance of a heart touched by the heavenly fire is sure to have a freshness which arrests the hearer.

The highest praise, however, for our geyser is still to come. Fervent, flowing, and fresh though it be, it would never have been so widely known to fame if it had not been *Faithful*. This is the marked feature in its work—so marked that from it it derives its name. As I have explained, the playing of the other geysers in the Park is more or less uncertain; the time of their eruption cannot be exactly gauged. But with “Old Faithful” it is otherwise. Punctually, at intervals of about sixty-five minutes’ duration, the glittering vision rises to the sky, and delights the expectant visitor. Can any higher commendation be given to a Christian than this?—“Beloved, thou doest *faithfully* whatsoever thou doest” (3 John, 5). “A faithful man, who can find?” (Prov. xx. 6). Ah! it is a rare virtue, this of faithfulness. How much is included in it! There is *faithfulness to Christ*, cleaving to the Lord with full purpose of *heart*. Faithfulness is a condition of heart. It is written of Abraham that God “found his heart faithful before Him.” Does your heart turn to Him as the needle to the pole amidst all life’s changes. There are not too many faithful to Him. Go out into the cold world and see. But will you be faithful? “They that are with Him are called, and chosen, and *faithful*” (Rev. xvii. 14).

And then there is surely included *faithfulness to our fellow man*. Herein we may learn a lesson from our geyser. Its remarkable characteristic is its punctuality. It brings forth fruit in its season. It neither disappoints nor delays. It can be relied on to fulfil the expectations formed of it at the appointed time. How far can such a testimony be borne to us ? and has not our obedience to God, even when yielded, been often tardy and leadenfooted ? “I made haste,” says the Psalmist, “and delayed not to keep Thy commandments” (Ps. cxix. 60) ; or, as the words might be rendered, “I did not stand what, what, whatting.” Promptitude is one of the most attractive features of true obedience. But again, faithfulness includes the thought of *a full discharge of duty*. Here, too, the geyser can instruct us. The volume of water sent upward appears to be fully maintained at every eruption. There is a remarkable evenness in the flow. Tried by this test, how does our service stand ? Has it never been unequal ? Is it not frequently so, and for this reason disappointing ? Some allowance must undoubtedly be made for human frailty. There are times when the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Yet to fulfil our task, “to count nothing done while aught remains undone” that we can do, this is indeed a high standard, but it is one which we should ever set before us. We do not forget that there is but One who could ever truly say of His work, “It is



finished," yet it is just this reflection that is our comfort. It is because He who loves finished works dwells in us that we may expect that He will both prompt and enable us, according to our poor measure, to follow, at however great a distance, in His steps. Yes, Christ loves finished works. It is this that gives us such hope for the future. "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me. Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever; forsake not the works of Thine own hands" (Ps. cxxxviii. 8).• He has finished the work of redemption. He offers not only to sanctify us wholly, but to at length finish that work of conformity with His own image and likeness, of which sanctification is rather the preparation than the fulfilment. And so to us He speaks in warning tones, "Take heed unto the ministry that thou hast received of Me, that thou fulfil it" (Col. iv. 17); and again in words of solemn rebuke, "I have not found thy works fulfilled before God" (Rev. iii. 2). Faithfulness, how can it be achieved? It is only possible to us if we are *full of faith*. We have seen that strength for duty must come to us by union with the strong. If we cease to draw upon the resources of our risen Head, our hands will soon hang down and our hearts fail us. Hence it follows that there is no past tense for faith. It is a perpetual present. To have breathed yesterday will avail us nothing if we do not breathe to-day. New supplies each hour we need, but we shall only meet

them as our faith is active and we are "pressing on to God."

But this brings us to inquire more closely into—

### III. THE CONDITIONS

which must be fulfilled if these characteristics of service are to be secured. And, still taking the geyser as our guide, we notice first that the channel must be *fashioned* through which the waters are to flow. The fountain we are considering has been hollowed out by the forces of Nature operating incessantly through the centuries of the past. But the forces that fashion the fountain of the believing soul are more ancient still. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with My loving-kindness have I drawn thee" (Jer. xxxi. 3). "This people have I formed for Myself. They shall show forth My praise" (Isa. xliii. 21). Thy "hands have made me and fashioned me," cries the Psalmist. "Oh, give me understanding, that I may learn Thy commandments." This fashioning takes us back into Eternity. "In Thy book were all my members written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them" (Ps. cxxxix. 16).

The words are as applicable to the new creation as to the old. The members of Christ's mystical body were written in the Lamb's Book of Life before the foundation of the world. There are mysteries here which we cannot fathom or trace, yet every

Christian knows that God begins, and that, if He did not, there would be no beginning. Oh, this fashioning! There is a great deal of it which we would gladly be spared, but we are the clay, and He is the potter. How can His dealings be otherwise than mysterious to creatures of a day? Yet, though His work be wrought upon a wheel, it is not the wheel of blinded Fortune or pitiless Fate. Far above the wheels—yes, the wheels within wheels, is the likeness of the appearance of a man—Christ lives, Christ reigns; and, though His thought is “a world dark with excess of bright,” yet we know that “every dark and bending line meets in the centre of His love,” and we can trust.

There is another condition which the geyser and the Christian must equally fulfil, and it is a very obvious one. The fountain must be *filled* before it can outflow. Often the spectator has to wait for hours before the liquid column greets his eyes; but the sure token that it is about to rise is the filling, and consequent bubbling of the water in the basin. It is not enough that far below the cauldron seethes and murmurs. It must be filled to its utmost capacity, even to the brim, before it can minister of its wealth to others. It is surely so in Christian experience. To be filled with the Spirit is a necessity for service. It is dangerous to be content with ebbing tides of grace—we need the full flowing of the flood if we are to be blessed ourselves, and still more if

we are to be a blessing to others ; at best we shall find we have no grace to spare. How significant the answer of the wise to the foolish virgins who sought their oil. "Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you."

In the day of Christ, at any rate, it will be found that the fullest supply of grace was not beyond our need ; and now and here, in days of work, suffering, and conflict, the very utmost grace we can receive will all be needed if we are to prove faithful to our trust.

One other feature of the geyser's action here comes prominently into view. I mean the season of repose required between each eruption to repair the waste of force and energy expended in the effort of the outburst. In other words, the geyser must be *fed*, and so must the Christian soul. The periods of repose, as we have seen, vary in duration. In the case of some geysers they are little longer than an hour ; in others a whole day is requisite ; in others a far longer interval still. But in every case the principle is the same—after action, rest ; after expenditure, renewal. Simple as the lesson is, who shall say that it is not needed ? This fountain of the soul requires not only to be filled, but fed. It is not enough, that is, to have received the fulness of God's Spirit. We need the silent spaces in our lives in which our strength may be renewed. It is not too much to say that these silent times are all important ; they are fraught with issues of the highest moment to our usefulness. Our Lord Himself, in the midst of

pressing work, has set us the example. He found time for communion with His Father, and so must we. "In the morning, rising up a great while before day, He departed into a solitary place, and there prayed" (Mark i. 35). Nothing will take the place of the secret fellowship with heaven. Time must be set apart for it. Service must not be allowed to take the place of communion. And appointed times are good. "Evening and morning, and at noontide," says the Psalmist, "I will pray and cry aloud, and Thou shalt hear my voice." Regular sustenance is as necessary to the soul as it is to the body. Deny it its appropriate food, and you cut off the source of its strength. What wonder if it weaken and fail. The time is not lost while the engine stops for water or for fuel. After all, life is a question of reserves. He who is not in touch with secret resources, who knows but little of feeding on the hidden manna, will soon find that to live a Christian life is beyond his strength. No experience of the past can take the place of the fresh supplies of to-day.

"Day by day the manna fell :  
Oh, to learn this lesson well."

These are some simple lessons from our geyser. Let us not despise them ; and, when life's short day is past, our service here shall be renewed around the Throne, where no intervals of repose are needed, in the presence of the King. Amen.

## CHAPTER VI

### ITS MARKS : FRUITFULNESS

“Behold the rod of Aaron budded and bloomed blossoms and yielded almonds.”—NUMBERS xvii. 8.

THE mystery of death and resurrection is the key to Scripture. We have it faintly foreshadowed even in Old Testament times, and in this chapter, in the story of Aaron’s rod that budded, we find one of the most striking pictures of the choice of Christ in resurrection—as our Great High Priest—that Scripture offers. But the story also treats of that transformation which every soul must know if it is to be a fruit-bearing branch in the Heavenly Vine. Let us look at this great change depicted in the story, and notice first—

### THE NEED OF IT

Thank God, there is hope for sticks. There are a good many of them about still, I am afraid, and very dry sticks too ; but there is a transformation offered them if they will but see their need of it and accept the conditions on which it is bestowed. What was the need in the case of Aaron’s rod ?

First, it was *lifeless*, it was a dead stick. And is not this a true picture of the soul that is yet a stranger to the quickening power of Christ ?

“What are our works but sin and death,  
Till Thou the quickening Spirit breathe?”

“He that hath the Son of God hath life, but he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” Life physical he may have, and life intellectual, but life spiritual he knows nothing of, unless he be Christ’s indeed.

But further, this stick was not lifeless only, but *fruitless* too. Barrenness is the invariable result of death. If the life of Christ be not in us all our efforts to please Him will be in vain. There is much that passes for Christian service which in the last day will be found to be valueless. Fruit is the evidence of life ; works are not necessarily the result of holy dispositions in the soul : a worker may be active in Christian service, and yet his heart be far from God.

This stick was fruitless, and it follows that it was *worthless* too. It was only a brand fit for the burning, and that is all you and I are before Christ finds us. It does not matter what your outward circumstances or advantages may be. We hear of silver-sticks and gold-sticks at earthly courts, but neither silver nor gold will avail us at the Court of the Heavenly King. Whatever our pretensions, if the life of Christ



be not ours, we shall be counted but as fuel for the fire—as worthless sticks.

So much for the need of the change, but what about—

### THE MANNER OF IT

First, it was *secret*. It was mysterious indeed. This rod, it has been truly said, was not transformed by any natural means. It was not planted in the ground, it had no roots to take hold of the soil, there was no natural cause to account for the change that was effected. The mystery of life came to it from the Hand of God. Let us remember God keeps that secret in His own Hand ; we cannot penetrate it. Don't turn away from the thought of spiritual life because it is mysterious. *All* life is a mystery. Vegetable, animal life is a mystery ; how much more must spiritual life be ! There is a line beyond which man's keenest vision cannot pierce, the subtlest intellect cannot penetrate ; it is the boundary line between life and death. I say the manner of the change, the mighty change which converts the dead stick into the living branch, is a secret known to God alone.

Notice further that this change was *sovereign*. “And it shall come to pass, that the man's rod *whom I shall choose* :” it was by God's choice that the dead stick blossomed, and it is by God's choice that the dead soul is quickened into life. “Ye have

not chosen Me," said Christ, "but I have chosen you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." The servants of God are born "not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." God begins, and if He did not there would be no beginning at all. It is a sovereign change.

Moreover, it was *sudden*. What! in one night was such a miracle possible? And mark, on that rod was seen a three-fold miracle. \*We read, "the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and yielded buds, and blossoms, and almonds." Was ever such a wonderful branch found before? Here was proof indeed that no fraud could have been perpetrated. It might have been possible to substitute a living stick for a dead one; but to produce a rod upon which buds, blossoms, and almonds—the three stages of the fruit of the tree—were present at once, this was a miracle indeed. Our God can abridge the processes of life. He does not always do so; He sends the tides of sap in early spring through boughs and branches; He clothes the dead skeletons of trees again with leafy robes of graceful foliage. But usually His work is by degrees. Slowly and silently the advance is made from early spring to glowing summer. But here He showed that He will not be bound even by His own laws; and in one short night, maturity was reached, as if to put beyond question the Almighty power of Him who does as

He pleases ; and no man can stay His hand or say to Him, What doest Thou ? Let us have more faith in the life-giving and healing power of God our Saviour. He can do more for us in one hour, when we are prepared for His working, than perhaps has been achieved in our experience for years. He, with whom nothing is impossible, can bring buds and blossoms and almonds into life at will. But now what were—

### THE MARKS

of this mighty change, and what will be the marks of a similar change wrought in you and me ?

There was *freshness*. The almond tree is the first tree to awaken out of the sleep of winter. So when God would teach Jeremiah the rapidity of His work He said to him, “Jeremiah, what seest thou ? and he said, An almond tree.” And God said, “Thou hast well seen, for I will hasten My Word to perform it.” This rod of the almond tree speaks of the freshness which is the mark of the presence of God’s mighty power. The rod indeed is a fitting emblem of Christ Himself—the Rod out of the stem of Jesse—which was beautiful and glorious, when all the other trees in the Garden of God stood dried and leafless. And especially does it remind us of His resurrection when cut off as an apparently lifeless rod. Christ was laid in the sepulchre in the dust, but was raised again to the confusion of all His foes on the Resur-

rection morning to bloom as the Tree of Life for evermore in the Paradise of God. Even so do the snow-white blossoms of the almond tree speak of the newness and freshness of the resurrection life to which by union with Christ His followers are called. There is in Christ a perennial source of freshness. Oh ! if the weary hearts of this world, ever seeking something new, chasing novelties as the boys do the butterflies in the spring, and never finding what they seek, would but believe that in the despised and neglected Rod which was cut off and buried, but which revived and now lives for ever, there is the happiness they seek, how many bitter disappointments would be spared !

Further, in this rod there was not only freshness but *fragrance*, not only life, but sweet-scented blossoms. Even so Christ is evermore a sweet savour, fragrant and acceptable to God, and fragrant and acceptable also to those who know Him amongst men. "His Name is as ointment poured forth."

"How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds  
In a believer's ear."

It follows, that if we are sharers in His resurrection there will be something of that fragrance going forth from us ; we, too, are called to be "a sweet savour of Christ." Something of His gentleness, of His patience, of His love, and of His faith should

be seen in our character and manifested in our lives. The mark of this mighty change is that men "take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus."

Once more, in this budded rod there was *fruitfulness*. It not only bloomed blossoms, but it yielded almonds ; there was not only promise but performing ; and so will it be with the Christian soul. Christ seeks fruit, not profession merely. He will have realities ; we know what they are. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith. If these dispositions of the heart are found in us there will surely follow those acts of loving service by which Christ is honoured and our Father in Heaven glorified.

Finally, it was declared of Aaron's rod that it should be *laid up and kept* in the tabernacle for a testimony. "Bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels," was God's command to Moses. May we not learn from this, as some one well suggests, that the influence of a Christian's testimony is to be perpetual ? There is to be a force about it which shall not be spent, but which shall go down from generation to generation—nay, that shall increase as the days go by. The influence of men like Wesley and Whitefield is greater after death than it could be in their lives. Tens of thousands in every age are influenced by their testimony and inspired by their example. Oh,

to live so as to be able to leave an example to those who follow us! One word as to—

### THE CONDITIONS

on which this change is wrought. The first is *confession*. Aaron had to bring his stick. We must bring the poor old stick of our natural life, we must acknowledge its barrenness and its worthlessness. "Speak unto the children of Israel, and take of every one of them a rod." Each one must do it for himself and for herself. Bring your stick, acknowledge your unworthiness, take the place of death. It is then that God can quicken you into life. The first condition is confession. Nothing can be done till you take your proper place.

The second is *committal*. What do we read?—"And thou shalt *lay them up* in the tabernacle of the congregation before the testimony, where I will meet with you." Lay up your rod, give yourself up just as you are, poor, worthless, and helpless; lay yourself at Christ's feet without delay. It is His work and His alone to make the change which you so much desire, but on your part there is required a complete surrender. Lay up your rod, give up yourself.

One other thing: there must be *confidence*. Have faith in God. Certainly Aaron's faith must have been tested by the events of that night. He knew that upon it would depend his consecration as the

High Priest, and his acknowledgment at the hands of his brethren as God's anointed minister. He had to leave himself in God's hands. It was for God to say whether the rod could be quickened into life. Aaron had faith in God, and you and I must have it too. It shall not be disappointed ; God may test our faith, but He will never disappoint it. "He saith not to the house of Israel, Seek ye My face in vain." Have faith in God, and before long, in your case also, the dry stick shall become a fruitful bough. The Lord hasten it in His time. Amen.



## CHAPTER VII

### ITS PRIVILEGES : SALVATION

“ To the uttermost ”—HEB. vii. 25.

How far is that ? Years ago I heard a preacher attempt before a rapt audience to describe how far God in His mercy had put our sins from us. I cannot recall his words, but they were based upon the text, “ As far as the east is from the west, so *far* hath He removed our transgressions from us ” (Ps. ciii. 12), and his idea was to picture a seraph vainly essaying to measure the distance between east and west.

The celestial messenger spread his pinions and never stayed his flight until he lighted on earth’s remotest bound. “ Tell me,” he cried, “ how far is it to yonder west ? ” But for answer men could only point to the vast expanse that stretched beyond their view. With new resolve the seraph plunged into the mighty void. With speed that distanced that of light itself he crossed the abyss which separates other worlds from ours, and now on the farthest shining star he stayed and asked, “ How far is it to yonder west ? ” But still the same answer was

returned, for before him still there stretched infinity. Weary of wing, the seraph turned, retraced his flight, and sought in the east a boundary which in the west had ever receded as he advanced. But here, too, his efforts were foredoomed to failure, and so at last, toilworn but glad of heart, the seraph came back to tell the blessed news that God's people's sins should ne'er be found again, for East and West, so he had learned, were but the names of God's doors into boundless space.

Something like this, something that is transcendent, immeasurable, surpassing all our efforts to define, struggles for expression in this great word of God—*εἰς τὸ παντελές*. Explain it as you will, there will still remain much land to be possessed, still greater heights to scale, still deeper mines of treasure to explore. Let us ponder the familiar words again until the bracing air they breathe invigorates and renews our souls. The passage speaks of Christ's ability—"He is able." Ability, we have heard men say, will always inspire confidence and command respect. And yet how little confidence men have in Jesus Christ! He is the last friend they think of turning to. "I hope things are not so bad as that, captain," was the involuntary remark of the passenger in the storm who had overheard the captain say, "We are in God's hands now, at any rate." To be in God's hands was to be in a desperate plight indeed; and that is just what most men think. They

will trust themselves, or their neighbours, or the merest stranger, or men they have never seen, or their luck, or the barest chance, but Jesus Christ—never! And yet, is not Jesus Christ worthy of confidence? Ask those who know Him. “They that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee: for Thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek Thee” (Ps. ix. 10).

Some of us, however weak and unworthy we may be, can at least say this much, that we have proved the only Being we *can* trust in a miserable world like this is Jesus Christ. The world will disappoint you, the Church will disappoint you, your own heart will disappoint you, but Jesus Christ—NEVER! And if the trials and disappointments through which you pass end in assuring you of this great unchanging truth, it will be well worth your while to have endured them all. But to encourage faith in Jesus Christ we must contemplate Him. Let us attempt to do so.

Take this Epistle to the Hebrews: we shall find it dedicated, like the Epistle to the Colossians, to all the glories of Christ. The writer of it had no easy task. He was writing to Jews. He knew how tenaciously they clung to their ancient privileges and to their ancient faith. He had to convince them that in leaving Judaism for Christianity they would be gainers, not losers, by the exchange. And thus it is that he begins by setting forth the superiority of Christ, our Lord, not merely to the prophets and

teachers who had gone before His face, but to the holy angels also, and to all created beings of whatsoever order in heaven or in earth. The Hebrew Church had ever attached the highest importance to the ministry of angels, and therefore the first step must be to show the superiority of Christ to angels. This is the subject of Chapter I. "Christ," says the writer, "is above angels." He is so—

### I. AS CREATOR

The angels indeed play an important part in the ordering of created things. The elements apparently are, or were once, much under their control; when permitted, they could send fire from heaven (Job i. 16), or let loose the hurricane which carries all before it in its destructive path (Job i. 19). Nay, if we follow the rabbinical interpretation of Psalm civ. 4 (quoted in Heb. i. 7), we shall understand that, in appearance at any rate, the angels sometimes are changed into flames of fire as they minister before the throne of God; or, when sent forth as His messengers, are transformed into winds. But while thus employed in mysterious agency, they are creatures still. They cannot create. Nay, more, at best they are variable and mutable in nature, as these transformations show. But while angels are mutable and all created things must pass away, Christ as Creator is evermore the same. For "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the

earth, and the heavens are the work of Thy hands : they shall perish, but *Thou remainest* : and they all shall wax old as doth a garment, and as a vesture shalt Thou fold them up, and they shall be changed : but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail."

Nor is this all : Christ is superior to the angels—

## II. AS SON

"To which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten thee?" (ver. 5). No doubt the angels also are termed the sons of God (Job i. 6), but it is in a sense altogether secondary. Even Adam may claim the title, for was he not God's son by creation? (Luke iii. 38). But Christ is Son by an eternal generation, to which possibly the expression "this day," interpreted as "the eternal now," refers; or, as St. Paul's use of the quotation seems rather to teach, it is to the resurrection of our Lord that this memorable passage from the second Psalm refers (Ps. ii. 7, with Acts xiii. 33, and Rom. i. 3). In any case, the oracle declares the Sonship of Christ as it has never spoken or can speak of the sonship of angels or of men. Finally—

## III. AS KING

Christ is above the angels. "Unto the angels," says the writer, "hath He not put into subjection the world to come which in this epistle is our

theme ? ” (ii. 5). To the angels the Old Testament dispensation was in some true sense committed. It was through the angels that the Law was given on Mount Sinai (Acts vii. 53 ; Gal. v. 19). To the angel Michael, apparently, was entrusted the guardianship of the Jewish nation (Dan. x. 13 ; xii. 1). Angels encamped around God’s people (Ps. xxxiv. 7), and delivered them (2 Kings vi. 17). Angels ministered to God’s saints in the day of their extremity (1 Kings xix. 5). Through angels God made known at divers times His will to His people (see Judg. ii. 1–4), so in later days to Zacharias (Luke i. 10), to Joseph (Matt. i. 20), and others. But what saith the Scripture ? There shall be “ new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness ” (2 Pet. iii. 13) ; and in the new world Christ, and not angels, will be supreme. In Him will be fulfilled the prophecy concerning man in Psalm viii., that all things shall be put beneath His feet ; and though even now and here we do by faith (iv. 3) enter into God’s rest, still we see not yet all things put under the true Man, the appointed King. We look for a better country —*i.e.* a heavenly. “ Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come ” (Heb. xiii. 14). There, at length, our toils and struggles will be forgotten, and we shall be, not as in the days of old, under the guidance even of the angels, but in the immediate presence of the King.

But there was another question to be solved. What

has the new revelation to say of Moses ? Will Christ supersede Moses ? Can there be a prophet greater than Moses ?—Moses, of whom it is written that he spake with God face to face (Num. xii. 8), and that God showed to him in the Mount the pattern of heavenly things. The name of Moses was and is a name of might. Can the founder of the new age be greater than the founder of the old ? That was the stumbling-block to the Jews in our Lord's day. "We know," said they, "that God spake unto Moses : as for this fellow, we know not whence He is" (John ix. 29). And it is the stumbling-block still. Ask a Jew in the East End of London to-day, and he will give you much the same answer. He cannot believe that "the Nazarene" is greater than Moses. Wisely and delicately does the writer deal with the difficulty. "Whether is greater," he asks, "the servant who builds the house, faithful and honoured though he be, or the Son whose house he is building ?" Obviously the Son.

But it has just been shown that Christ is the Eternal Son—that He is Son of God, as no created being, angel, or man could ever be. It follows inevitably that the servant must give place to the Son. Moses (as on the Mount of Transfiguration) must disappear, while from the open heaven we hear the mysterious voice saying, as Christ is found alone : "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ; hear ye Him" (Matt. xvii. 5).



Once more, Christ, who is higher than the angels—Christ, who is “counted worthy of more glory than Moses” (Heb. iii. 3), must also be revealed as the true High Priest, in whom all the types and shadows of the Levitical priesthood are fulfilled, and at whose appearing all its glory fades away. And this to the Jew was the most momentous question of all. The priest was the pivot on which the machinery of the Mosaic ritual revolved. Would the worshipper draw nigh to God?—he must do so through the priest. Did he seek to receive a blessing at God’s hand?—the priest was the channel through which it must be conveyed. And to-day priesthood is as great a necessity as ever. It appeals to the deepest needs of the heart of man.<sup>1</sup> Deep down in every man’s consciousness, however much he may seek to forget it or to hide it from himself, there lurks and lingers a sense of guilt. Something there is in him which makes him shrink from the presence of his Maker, and, like Adam, whose son he is, hide himself from the gaze of perfect holiness behind the trees of the garden.

That guilty consciousness is the strength of priesthood; without it an institution so often associated with ignorance and superstition would never have survived. For what is a priest? He is a man taken from among men, clothed with a certain symbolical purity, and empowered, as he believes, to act as an

<sup>1</sup> See “Priesthood,” by E. Mellor.

intermediary between his fellow-men and God. "It is too true," he cries—"your own consciousness affirms it—that you are unfit to draw nigh to God yourself. You are sinful and He is infinitely pure. But be of good cheer, entrust yourself to me; I am authorised to act on your behalf, and I will undertake your case." Is it not clear that if such a claim can be sustained, the power of the priesthood is practically unlimited, and the priest at once the most indispensable and most formidable of men? From this claim put forth by sinful men what darkness, what oppression, and what misery have flowed! To prove it baseless and to point men to the great Daysman, who alone is equal to the tremendous task not only of absolving men from sin, but of lifting them to the heavenly life, is, we may truly say, the great object for which this epistle was written.

Now observe the writer's reasoning. How does he proceed? He brings a newcomer on the stage, or, rather, he revives our interest in a mysterious figure who appeared upon the page of history centuries before. "Thou art a priest for ever," he writes, "after the order of Melchizedek." Melchizedek, who and what is he? For the moment we shall leave the question unanswered. We begin by taking it for granted that the point is proved: Christ is the true High Priest, and this is His prerogative: "he is ABLE TO SAVE TO THE UTMOST

them that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." Here, then, is salvation—first, in *its subjects* ; next, in *its extent* ; and lastly, in *its author*. First in—

## I. ITS SUBJECTS

Whom is Jesus Christ able to save? Probably we have all thought of this text as applying to the unconverted. We have said, and said truly, that this verse holds out hope for the very worst, for the outcast, for the hopeless, for the Manasseh sinner, the sinner of the deepest dye, for the soul that has sinned against light and against knowledge, for the prodigal who has wandered farthest from the Father's house. Yes, that is true—it is most true ; but it is not the primary truth of the text. Look at it more closely, and you will see it is addressed

### NOT TO WANDERERS, BUT TO WORSHIPPERS.

Mark the expression "them that come." In chapter x. 1, we find that "comers" are worshippers. The sacrifices of the Law could never make "the comers" thereunto perfect. Why? Because "the worshippers once purged (comers and worshippers are identified) would have had no more conscience of sins."

Yes, worshippers are comers. The true believer is always coming. "To whom coming?" Rightly

understood, faith can have no past tense ; believing is like breathing—it is a perpetual present. The life of faith is a continual travelling between human emptiness and divine fulness. Salvation is needed for saints as well as sinners.

I remember hearing of a good man who objected to the prayer in our liturgy, “O Lord, save Thy people.” “Why,” said he, “they are saved already.” Alas! would that it were so! What a different Church, what a different world ours would be if they were! The truth is, salvation is a mighty word. It looks back on the past in gratitude to Him “who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling” (2 Tim. i. 9). It embraces the present, for day by day we are “receiving the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls” (1 Pet. i. 9); and it anticipates the future, for we were saved in hope waiting for a salvation “ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. i. 5). It would fare ill with us if we were excluded from all future share in such a salvation as this.

But, further, mark this salvation in—

## II. ITS EXTENT

How far is Jesus Christ able to save? This brings us to our title, “To the uttermost.” As we have said already, we can never exhaust its meaning. The word in the Greek is a compound word. It combines two thoughts—the thought of

completeness and the thought of duration. Jesus Christ is able completely and for evermore to save. Was there ever a gladder evangel to proclaim to the sons of men? Jesus Christ can save: He can *to the uttermost depth of human need*. The love of Christ, says one, is not a buoy that floats upon the waves; it is a grappling-iron that fathoms the lowest depths of the ocean of human sin and need. It can reach you or others, whatever the darkness into which you have fallen; it can heal you, whatever the sore that lies hidden in your heart. The power of Jesus can not only hover round the temple of your being, it can search out its deepest recesses, it can penetrate to its innermost shrine. It avails not only to purify the open channels of your life; it can deal with the fountain, it can cleanse the Augean stable, it may be, of your secret thoughts. Yes, to the uttermost depth of human need and to *the uttermost height of the divine promises* Jesus Christ is able to save. Not beyond them, of course; for all our expectations must be tested by His word. But who of us can exhaust their range?

I remember once taking a friend of mine into an assembly which was to her very strange in its enthusiasm and intense spiritual atmosphere. She had never been in anything like it before. I did not know whether she would agree with everything she heard, but afterwards she said: "One thing I was struck with." "What was that?" I said. She

answered : " There was such an absence of care on their faces." They were there in hundreds, perhaps thousands—almost all of them poor people ; but they were saved from care. What a wonderful testimony ! " The solar light " shone out of those poor tabernacles because the Shekinah was within. They had an uttermost salvation, for Christ's promises reveal a peace which can deliver us even from our cares.

One thing more : This salvation, to the uttermost means salvation *to the latest hour of life*.

There is a story told of Alexander the Great that, when the fancy took him, he would order a burning lamp to be set down without the walls of the city he was besieging. Then he would offer mercy to the besieged if they surrendered before the lamp went out. Was this the origin of the familiar lines—

" While the lamp holds out to burn,  
The vilest sinner may return " ?

I know not, but I know that a greater King than Alexander pledges His mercy to the last dying gleam of our life's flickering flame.

When the shadows begin to lengthen, and the days to darken, and the strength to weaken, and the clouds return after the rain, then Christ will not desert us or leave His work half done ; for, having loved His own which were in the world, He loves them to the end. At a recent conference in Germany the patriarch of the assembly, bearing an honoured

name, seemed well-nigh the brightest and in spirit the youngest of us all. His eighty years had not quenched his zeal or damped his joy in the service of his Lord ; his salvation was a salvation to the uttermost. Is it not written, " Even to your old age I am He, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you : I have made, and I will bear ; even I will carry, and will deliver you " ? (Isa. xlv. 4). " This God is our God for ever and ever : He will be our guide even over death " <sup>1</sup> (Ps. xlviii. 14).

Once more we have here salvation in—

### III. ITS AUTHOR

Who is He, and how is it that He is able to save ? The first answer is to be found in—

#### THE PRE-EMINENCE OF HIS PRIESTHOOD

There are three, or, if the patriarchal age be included, four priesthoods known to Scripture : the first was that of the Head of the family who in primæval days was both chief and priest ; the other three are the Levitical priest-hood of Aaron, the Melchizedek priesthood of our Lord, and the spiritual priesthood of believers in Him. Our Lord is a Priest of the order of Melchizedek, that mysterious personage who " belongs to no priestly family," who, so far as the record of him goes, is " without beginning of days or end of life," and

<sup>1</sup> Kay's Translation.



“of whom it is witnessed,” not that he died, but that “he liveth.” This Priest, argues the writer, Levi himself acknowledged as his superior ; for did he not pay tithes to him in the person of Abraham his ancestor ? He bears the gracious titles King of Righteousness and King of Peace, and in all these things foreshadows the true High Priesthood of the Son of God. But the main point in Christ’s priesthood, the great reason for His ability to save, lies in—

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#### THE PLACE IN WHICH HE MINISTERS

This, indeed, is the very pith and gist of the whole matter. As says the writer, “Of the things which we have spoken, the chief point [R.V.] is this” (Heb. viii. 1)—*viz.* that our High Priest is not on earth, but in heaven ; that He is the minister of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man ; that He is set down on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, and that therefore we, too, are partakers of a heavenly calling, and that He can do for us what no earthly priest could ever do—lift us “in heart and mind whither He Himself has gone before.” The grace He gives is not only grace ; it is glorified grace, and hence it becomes possible for us to taste on earth the life of heaven.

“Men of grace have found  
Glory begun below.”

Closely connected with the place of His ministry is—

#### THE PERPETUITY OF HIS OFFICE

“They truly,” says the writer, referring to the Levitical priesthood, “were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death. But this man, because He continueth ever, hath a priesthood *which passeth not from one to another*” (Heb. vii. 23, 24. A.V., marg.). Aaron died, and Eleazar succeeded him ; Eleazar died, and Phinehas succeeded him : but Christ ever lives, and in this priesthood He has and can have no successor. It follows that of sacrificing priests in these days upon earth there can be none, though, thank God, spiritual priests all faithful Christians are. But let us shrink from taking the place which belongs only to our Lord. Christ saves to the uttermost because He ever lives to save. Earthly friends may change or die. The other day a poor man called on me for help. “Where are your friends,” I asked, “who knew you in brighter days?” “Alas ! they are all dead,” he answered ; “there are none to know me now.” As I heard him, I thought how blessed to have a Friend who never dies ; and such a Friend is Jesus Christ.

Again, Christ is able to save because of—

#### THE PRECIOUSNESS OF HIS BLOOD

Not that He is offering it often, or that He is continuing the offering of it. The idea often urged, that

in the Holy Communion the Church is representing on earth what Christ is doing in heaven, is wholly without support in this epistle. "The culminating point of Christ's atoning sacrifice is His entrance into the Holiest, and this is an act done *once for all*" (ix. 12, 26; x. 12).<sup>1</sup>

"The modern conception," writes Bishop Westcott, "of Christ pleading in heaven His Passion, offering His blood on behalf of men, has no foundation in the epistle. His glorified humanity is the eternal pledge of the absolute efficacy of His accomplished work. He pleads, as older writers truly expressed the thought, by His presence on the Father's throne."<sup>2</sup>

Yet, though we must eliminate from the thought of His intercession merely popular ideas concerning it, and though "to define it in itself may be impossible," it remains true that His presence within the vail, "*as a Lamb that had been slain*" (Rev. v. 6), is a perpetual and a personal intercession. You and I can never know how much we owe to it.

Next to the death of Christ, the most precious truth in Scripture is His life. He intercedes personally; He does not depute His work to others. Sometimes in our law-courts it happens that our leading counsel are too busy to attend; they are compelled to entrust their clients' case to juniors—

<sup>1</sup> See Davidson, Hebrews, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> Westcott on Hebrews, p. 230.

often with disastrous consequences. But it is not so with Christ ; “ worlds on worlds are hanging on His hand,” but He has always time to give to those who trust Him. From how many known and unknown perils has His intercession saved us ! From how many will it save us still.

Finally, Christ is able to save because of—

### THE POWER OF HIS SPIRIT

As our ascended Priest upon His throne He has “ received gifts from men—yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God may dwell among them.” Yes, Christ still sends upon waiting hearts His purifying power ; He still baptizes with the Holy Ghost and with fire. This is the crowning gift of redemption. It is by the Holy Ghost that the heavenly life is ours. Have you received not “ It,” but “ Him ” ? An uttermost salvation means a heart on which the Holy Ghost has fallen, and in which Christ lives and reigns. Come, then, O come ! and upon you, if you give up your all, the flame shall fall, and you will know that a daily, hourly, momentary salvation is bestowed even to the uttermost upon all who come unto God by Him. Amen.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ITS PRIVILEGES : SANCTITY

“Christ—made unto us—Sanctification.”—1 Cor. i. 30.

It is a frequent though ill-founded objection to the doctrine of justification by faith only, that it overlooks the necessity of holy living, that the effect of teaching it will be to lead men to suppose that no radical change of life is needed in themselves, that they may believe in Christ and yet live as they please. How great a fallacy this is every true Christian is aware, for he knows that wherever Christ is really received a new nature is received with Him, and that the tendency of the new disposition is as truly to holiness as that of the former was to sin. It is, however, lawful to learn even from objections, and it is possible that there may have been, at times, some excuse for the criticism referred to ; not because justification by faith has been preached too much, but because it has been preached too exclusively. In the wonderful passage from which the words at the head of this paper are taken, the apostle guards against this danger by coupling together in closest alliance the two great truths of Christ our

righteousness and Christ our sanctification. The full force of the two conjunctions which unite these expressions in the Greek does not appear in our English version ; but they mean that in the thought of God it is not allowable to dis sever sanctification as an effect from righteousness as a cause. At the same time it cannot be denied that the truth of Christ our sanctification is not always so clearly apprehended by the believer, as the initial and fundamental truth of Christ our righteousness. God's way of peace, in short, is better understood than God's way of holiness.

The subject is so important and has so often suffered from inadequate statements on the one hand, and exaggerated expressions on the other, that a brief study of it can hardly fail to be useful. As to *the need of sanctification* all Christians are agreed. The will of God must surely be the rule of His people, and His will for us in this matter is laid down in the clearest terms ; “ This is the will of God, even your sanctification ” (2 Thess. iv. 3), and again, “ Be ye holy for I am holy.” The character of the God men worship will certainly be reflected in the worshipper. It is obvious, also, that sanctification is necessary *as an evidence of our regeneration*. It is, in fact, the answer to the infidel's cavil to which we have just referred, it is the proof that, though man is justified by faith alone, he is not justified by “ faith which is alone.” And for our own

sake what better way could we devise to make our calling and election sure than this, that we are growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Again, we shall all admit that sanctification is needed *to prepare us for heaven*. "Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people," the atmosphere of heaven is holy, the inhabitants of heaven are holy, the apostles and prophets who have entered there are holy, the angels who stand around the throne are holy; above all, the cry of the seraphim before Him who is in the midst of the throne is "Holy, Holy, Holy." Surely it becomes us, if we are to spend eternity in His presence, to seek to be like-minded with Him, nay, it is a necessity, "for without holiness no man shall see the Lord." It is not always so fully recognised that sanctification is necessary to prepare us not only for heaven hereafter, but *for service here*. It is when the vessel is purged from defilement that it becomes "a vessel to honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use." Isaiah was first sanctified and then sent.

It is clear on every ground that sanctification affects *our usefulness in the world*. Men look at actions rather than words: they may not understand our creed, but they are very quick to criticise our conduct. A holy life is the best testimony we can bear to them of the reality of our profession. Though we cannot see the pilot on board the vessel,



yet as we watch the good ship threading the shoals and reefs we know his hand is on the helm. And so in daily life when our conduct is shaped so as to avoid the rocks and quicksands which beset us, and we are brought safely into the harbour where we would be, it is plain even to the most sceptical that there is an unseen commander in control. Thus, sanctification is needful both for the life which now is and for that which is to come.

But if the need of sanctification be acknowledged, what shall we say as to its *nature*? What are we to understand by it? We must not confuse it with justification. Though in a certain sense Christ may be said to be our sanctification as He represents us before God, since His righteousness covers not merely our sins before conversion, but our shortcomings as His people; yet it is not an imputed but an imparted sanctification that is here intended. Perhaps three words will sum up the main ideas that underlie the thought of sanctification. The first is *separation*. The Lord has "set apart him that is godly for Himself." That is a root idea of sanctification—a separation to God—a separation for holy purposes. In this sense our Lord says, "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, I set myself apart, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." But there is the further thought of *purification*. "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil,

learn to do well." What is worthy of special notice is that in this purification there is a cleansed condition of soul which is to be received through faith, and which may be received now. We read in Acts xv. 9, of the effect of Pentecost, that God purified their hearts by faith. We find sanctification in this sense distinctly placed within the reach of faith—"Sanctified by faith which is in Me" (Acts xxvi. 18). We see that there is an immediate cleansing from sin, from all sin within the range of consciousness which Christ can effect in those who trust Him. And this by no means militates against the other and complementary view of sanctification—viz., that it is a gradual process. Purification is the removal of hindrances to growth, *transformation* is the gradual progress in the growth itself. And so we find the apostle urging an immediate cleansing (2 Cor. vii. 1, aorist), which is to be accompanied by a gradual perfecting in holy conversation and godliness.

What, however, is of special interest in this particular passage is what we may describe, thirdly, as *the means of sanctification*. How is Christ made sanctification to us? We answer, first, *not merely by a presentation of motives*; no doubt motives are presented—motives of gratitude, motives of love, all have their appointed place, but who has not found that the motive power of these affections fails to produce the good fruit which was expected from

them. We ought to be grateful, but our gratitude is sadly evanescent ; we ought to love, but how dull and cold our love soon grows. No, the presentation of motives will not suffice, something more is needed.

*Nor is He our sanctification merely by the exhibition of a Pattern*—He is our accepted and perfect pattern, the absolutely faultless life was found in Him alone ; but to present Christ as a pattern may rather depress than encourage me. If all that is given is a pattern I shall despair of imitating it, and despair is the death-knell of exertion. There must be something more than a pattern or Christianity would be a failure. But Christ offers us far more than a pattern. He is our sanctification first as to its *source*. It is remarkable, indeed, that sanctification in Scripture should be ascribed to each person in the Holy Trinity. We read in Jude i. “ Sanctified by God the Father.” In 2 Thessalonians ii. 13 sanctification is declared to be through the Spirit, and it is certain that the Holy Ghost is the great agent in this work ; yet both here and in Hebrews ii. 11, we find sanctification ascribed to Christ. We may certainly, therefore, say that Christ, as Head of His Church, is the source of its sanctity. What light does this fact throw upon the means of sanctification ? It teaches us that, as we have already indicated, holy dispositions are received not by any efforts of our own, but by faith in our sanctifier. Not only has Christ procured them for us by His blood, He

actually communicates them to us ready made by His Spirit, and our great responsibility is not to manufacture them but to receive them. No wonder that those who imagine that they have to work themselves up into a holy frame find it a hard and bitter task. It is not only hard, it is impossible. As Walter Marshall says, we can no more get holiness out of our own hearts than we can get blood out of flint. We must turn our eyes from ourselves to Him who is the source of all holiness ; He will supply all our need ; "From Him is our fruit found"—or, better still, "In Him is our fruit ready."

Further, Christ is made our sanctification as to its *sphere*—i.e. He is made to us a sanctuary in which we may be safe. The word "sanctification" is translated in the Septuagint (Isaiah viii. 14), as "sanctuary." This gives us the thought of a spiritual atmosphere into which we may plunge, a hiding-place into which we may flee, and in which we may abide, and only as we do thus abide in Christ, in fellowship with Him, shall we be in a position to receive from Him and to be sanctified by Him. And this brings us last of all to say that Christ is made to us sanctification as to its *secret*. There are secrets in all trades, they say ; there is certainly a secret in the art of holy living. If you would be holy you must not only have Christ for you, you must have *Christ in you*. This is the secret hid from ages and generations, but now made manifest

to the saints. This is the riches of the glory of the mystery which before time was hid in God, but is now revealed to us, even "Christ in you the hope of glory." Christ Himself is willing "to tabernacle in us, and to sanctify us by His glory" (Exod. xxix. 43). What do we know of this indwelling? Have we ever expected it? Have we received Christ not only as a life-giver, but as a sanctifier? We have come to Christ, we are justified. But has Christ come to us? Have we admitted Him as the Refiner of our being? If not, why not? He is waiting to make His royal entry. Hear His voice, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him and he with Me." The secret of victory is here, it is an indwelling Saviour that makes an overcoming life. May it be ours to experience it. Amen.

## CHAPTER IX

### ITS PRIVILEGES : SOLACE

“To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them BEAUTY FOR ASHES, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified.”—ISAIAH lxi. 3. •

IN these words we find Christ revealing Himself in His office of Comforter. The world needs comfort. Sorrow and suffering surround us on every hand, and the religion which cannot strengthen us in the hour of our distress will never meet the needs of human nature. Stoicism may tell us to hold ourselves superior to pleasure or to pain, but stoicism is not the religion for a sin-stricken world like ours. Christ transcends all other teachers, and He has something better to offer those who trust in Him.

It is interesting to remember that the title of Comforter belongs to each person in the Trinity. It is a blessed title. God is “the God of all comfort.” The name which appeals to us most when we think of the Holy Spirit is that of “the Comforter,” and here and elsewhere Christ is set forth as “the Consolation of Israel.” The Three Persons unite in this office of Comforter. Would that men whose hearts

are bleeding and aching from the thousand different wounds which life inflicts believed it! Would that they would come to Him whose very name and nature proclaim that He is the Comforter of His people!

Let us ask two questions—

### I. WHOM DOES CHRIST COMFORT?

I have said would that all men would come to Christ for comfort, but in the verse before us there is a *limitation* imposed. We read “To appoint unto them that mourn *in Zion*.” I say, there is a limit imposed. It is not imposed by the love of God. God would have all men comforted if they were but willing to receive His comfort. Christ says, “How often would I have gathered Thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” It was His complaint, “Ye *will not* come to me that ye might have life,” and it is His complaint to-day that men will not come to Him that they might have comfort. Look at the sinner, the drunkard seeking consolation in his cups, the gambler drowning thought at the card-table, the suicide seeking refuge from life’s ills in flight, seeking comfort anywhere, everywhere, but in Christ. Yet Christ longs to administer comfort. But it is only to those who come to Him that His comfort is assured.

“To appoint unto them that *mourn in Zion*.” *It*



*is better to mourn in Zion than it is to be at ease in Zion.* There are some of whom it is said that they are "at ease in Zion." There is no word of comfort for them, but rather a warning "to let their laughter be turned to mourning and their joy to heaviness." But let us notice—

## II. THE MANNER OF HIS COMFORT

*How does He comfort those who come to Him?* This passage teaches us. First, I observe that *He comforts surely.* "To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion." Is sorrow appointed? Certainly it is. Sorrows do not spring out of the ground. There is no chance in them, but if the sorrow is appointed we shall find that the Comforter is appointed too. Here is a promise that the comfort shall be as sure as the sorrow. In God's dealings there is a wonderful balance kept if we only knew it. God can compensate us in marvelous ways if we will trust Him. He knows how to do it. We may not see the way, but He Himself knows what He will do if you will but take Him at His word.

Further, Christ's comfort is a *discriminating comfort*. There are probably three classes of mourners suggested here. Notice what the text says: "To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes." The Oriental is very demonstrative. He expresses his inward feelings by

his outward garb. If he is overwhelmed with sorrow he clothes himself in sackcloth and sits in ashes. If he is glad and joyful he will array himself accordingly in garments of blue and white and purple, as Mordecai did in Shushan the palace. It is to this custom that Christ refers when He says He will exchange the sable habiliments of woe for the festal garments of joy. But as there are different classes of mourners, there are also different aspects of the comfort that He gives. There is first of all *pardon for the penitent*. To sit in ashes was frequently a sign of humiliation for sin. We find Job saying, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job xlii. 5, 6). The first class of mourners whom Christ desires to comfort are those who are sorrowing for sin. In Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" you will see the picture of this mourner painted from life. There he is with his burden on his back, clothed in rags, flying from the wrath to come, leaving the City of Destruction and inquiring the way to the Celestial City, asking Evangelist, whom he meets, to instruct him, not caring what difficulties he passes through if only he can escape, not turning back though his wife and children seek to detain him, but putting his fingers in his ears and flying for his life. He is under the burden and pressure of guilt. The Book which he reads confirms

the verdict of his conscience and the longer he reads the more alarmed he becomes. Reader, have you ever had any such experience as that? It is the first step. There is no abiding peace, there is no consolation for the man who has never felt his need of it. Have you ever felt your need of comfort under the burden of sin? If not, I pray you as you read these lines to ask God to show you your need of that comfort which the blood of Christ alone can procure. Thanks be to God He not only pardons us but clothes us in His beauty. He makes us perfect in His comeliness which He puts upon us, "the righteousness of God which is by faith in Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe;" for there is no difference, for "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Reader, have you received this first blessed exchange of joy for sorrow? Have you been clothed in the garments of salvation? Have you come to Christ as a Penitent for Pardon?

But there is another class. I remember being much interested when it was first pointed out to me by a friend that in the Hebrew the word which is translated "beauty" is the word used in the Book of Exodus for the head-dress of the priests. We read at the fortieth verse of the twenty-eighth chapter, "For Aaron's sons thou shalt make coats, and thou shalt make for them girdles, and bonnets shalt thou make for them for glory and for

*beauty.*” This bonnet or mitre was the mark of the priestly office. If a priest was not wearing his mitre, he was not fully arrayed in his priestly dress or qualified to perform his functions. And if through any ceremonial uncleanness or failure he had forfeited his right to perform them, he would be stripped of his mitre.

Such a picture is given us in the third of Zechariah, where we have Joshua, the high priest, standing before the angel of the Lord without a mitre and “clothed with filthy garments.” He feels that sin has prevailed against him and that he cannot open his lips. And Satan accuses him. I fear there is many a priest of God like Joshua. He ought to speak for Christ but sin has closed his lips; he is out of function; instead of victory there is failure, and instead of wearing his mitre he has ashes on his head. He is conscious that his Christian life is a failure, and he does not know how to lift up his heart to his God. This is another class of mourners, but Christ has comfort even for them. Zechariah said, “Let them set a fair mitre upon his head,” let him have the power back again, the power for priestly service; let him be restored to privilege and to favour; let him have beauty for ashes, and it was granted. So we see that if Christ’s first gift is pardon for the penitent, His second is *victory for the vanquished*. Though we have been overcome so often, still there is comfort for us in

Christ. He can reverse all that. He can heal our hurts and give us victory for defeat and strength for weakness. Thirdly, we have *solace for the sorrowing*.

The promise continues, "the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." I suppose that this refers to those who are called to pass through deep waters, to part with those whom they have dearly loved. They have been overwhelmed with sorrow, the dark shadow of death has fallen upon their home and they have asked, "Wherefore is all this come upon me? I looked for peace but behold adversity. I shall go mourning all my days in the heaviness of my soul." No, say not so. Christ's comfort meets us here. The wise man says, "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting." Many have found it so. It would seem as if Christ were specially attracted by those who are in sorrow. It was to the two disciples on their way to Emmaus as they walked, and *were sad*, that Christ joined Himself. He has a special sympathy with sorrow; He is the "Man of Sorrows," and "acquainted with grief." Grief was His intimate bosom friend, His daily companion. Sorrow in a thousand different guises met Him everywhere. The whole "encyclopædia of sorrow" is known to Him, and He knows its remedy. He can give "the oil of joy for mourning." St. Bernard used to say of

those who were in sorrow, that "the world sees the smart, but it does not see the oil which is poured in to heal it." I often marvel how those who are strangers to Christ sustain their sorrows. I do not understand how they get through a world like this without the comfort which Christ offers. I am never surprised to hear of suicides or persons losing their reason in the presence of some terrible sorrow. If men do not know the secret of comfort in sorrow what are they to do? Christ has the secret. He promises to give "the oil of joy for mourning." He can change sorrow into joy. "Weeping may endure for a night but joy cometh in the morning." There are many ingredients in this holy oil. The holy oil is a special symbol of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. He whispers in the ears of those who are bereaved "It is the hand that was pierced for you that has smitten you." He whispers again, "It is only for a little while" "Those whom you love are not lost but gone before." He tells you that through this very sorrow you shall come into a deeper sympathy with Himself than you could ever have had without it, that this grief shall turn to your everlasting gain, and that He will wipe away all tears from your eyes. How blessed to have such a Comforter! We shall feel, when our journey is over, that it was worth while to go through all we have gone through to have gained the knowledge that we have gained of



Christ's power to comfort the soul that trusts Him in the hour of sorrow.

And then there is another class. "The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." Here we have *deliverance for the depressed*. Mr. Feeblemind and Mr. Despondency are spoken of in Bunyan's allegory. They were true pilgrims but they were sackcloth Christians. They looked always on life's dark side; they forgot that doubts and fears are not mentioned among the fruits of the Spirit. Christ would have us wear the robe of praise instead of the garment of despondency. He would have us exchange our sadness for His gladness. There is no gladness like the gladness which Jesus Christ gives, there is no joy so lasting and abiding as His joy. Let us not be content with just knowing that our title to heaven is secure, let us have the joy which he offers to those who trust Him, which can make us conquer in the fight, give us peace in the midst of affliction, and lift our spirit out of despondency into the pure atmosphere of our Saviour's presence.

Finally, in this blessed exchange I read *satisfaction for the saint*. Ashes remind us sadly of our mortality. "Dust we are and unto dust must we return." Over us all the solemn words will one day be uttered: "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust." But we sorrow not as those that have no hope. Christ's comfort fails not even in death—He will give us



“beauty for ashes,” He will “change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body” (Phil. iii. 21).

“When in dust and ashes to the grave I sink,  
While heaven’s glory flashes o’er the shelving brink,  
On Thy truth relying through that mortal strife,  
Lord receive me dying to eternal life.”

“I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness” (Ps. xvii. 15).

AMEN.

## CHAPTER X

### ITS PRIVILEGES : SUCCOUR

“ He can help.”—HEB. ii. 18.

“ ABLE to help.” What a word of comfort it is !

The whole verse runs thus : “ In that He Himself has suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.” We are always more or less in need of help, but this passage suggests that there are special times in our lives when that need is felt more than others. We are not to limit the word “ tempted ” to its first signification to solicitation to sin : it includes that aspect of temptation, of course, but it embraces more. It is the word our Lord employs in St. Luke xxii. 28, “ Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations,” by which He means all the troubles and trials of that tried and suffering life from the first day of His public ministry to the last. And it is a comfort to remember that whatever may be the cup of trial you and I are called upon to drink, Christ has tasted it—nay, more, He has drained it to its dregs.

Times of trial are very varied in human life ; sometimes they are seasons of *temporal trouble and*

*distress*, straitened circumstances, perhaps in some cases actual poverty; or it may be, trials in business, trials in the home, loss of friends, bereavement; times when the soul is ready to say, "All these things are against me." At such times Christ is able to help.

Then there are times of *spiritual darkness and perplexity*. "Thou didst hide Thy face from me and I was troubled," writes the Psalmist. Faith seems to fail, and the joy of salvation lost; these are times of trial indeed. It is remarkable that it was not until our Saviour entered into the shadow of the darkness which fell upon Him as our Surety, not until as the Sin-Bearer God's face was hidden from Him for a moment, that He uttered one cry, I will not say of complaint, but of suffering, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" He could bear anything but that.

Now let us remember that since He Himself has suffered in times of darkness He is able to succour those who are similarly tried now. There are *times of physical weakness* when health seems gone, and help is sorely needed. I am not sure that weak health is not in the front rank of trials hard to be borne. A man can throw off his troubles when he is strong and well, but when broken down by sickness it is not so easy a matter. Satan seemed to understand that when he said to God of Job, "Put forth Thy hand now and touch his bone and flesh"

(Job ii. 5), as much as to say, "that will settle it." He knew that physical suffering was hard to bear. At such times let us take the comfort of this verse, "He is able to help."

It may, however, be asked, how is this help rendered, what is *the manner of His help*? No doubt there are many answers to the question. We are inclined to say first *by the teaching of His Word*. "Unless Thy law had been my delight," says the Psalmist, "I had even perished in my affliction." God's Word has a wonderfully enlightening and comforting power. For one thing the believer learns from it that sufferings are *inevitable*. "We must," writes the Apostle, "through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts xiv. 22). In nothing "moved by these afflictions," he says on another occasion, "for yourselves know we are appointed thereunto" (1 Thess. iii. 3). There is no royal road, this is the way the Master went, and shall not the servant tread it still? Further, from the Scripture we learn that our sufferings are *tolerable*, that is to say, however great they are there is a limit to them. "God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able to bear" (1 Cor. x. 13). It may be almost as much as you are able to bear sometimes, but not beyond that. The Refiner sits opposite the crucible and watches the action of the flame. And then lastly we learn that our sufferings are *profitable*. Sometimes they

are (as some one has said of St. Paul's thorn in the flesh), *corrective*. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept Thy word" (Ps. cxix. 67). Sometimes they are *preventive*. He had not sinned, but the thorn was sent lest he should exalt himself above measure. At all times sufferings are *instructive*. They teach us what we really are; they are like torches let down into a dark cavern,—they show the things that are there, things that perhaps have never been perceived before. They show us there is a needs-be if we are in heaviness through manifold temptations.

Next, Christ helps us *by the anointing of His Spirit*. Sometimes a special manifestation of His grace and power is given before the trial. It may not be understood at the moment, but afterwards it is seen that it was to prepare him for it. Sometimes the manifestation of the Divine Presence is in the very moment of the trial as it was to the three youths in the furnace, when the form of the fourth was like the Son of God. But in any case the real secret of strength in trial is the revelation of the indwelling of Christ in us which enables the tried believer to say, "I know both how to be abased and how to abound. . . . I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me" (Phil. iv. 13).

One word must be added as to *the grounds of Christ's ability* thus to help. How is it He is so able to help? The context supplies the answer. Let me

give it you in four words. The first is *conformity*. We read in verse 17, "In all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren." He could not help us unless He became bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and therefore, though absolutely holy and without sin, He yet was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. He was "made of the seed of David, according to the flesh," a Man amongst men. His own favourite title is "The Son of Man." But this is not all, conformity led up to *consecration*. Here in this verse we have it, He was to be a High Priest. The High Priesthood of Christ is the theme of this Epistle, but enough for us here to notice that our Lord is appointed, set apart for this great office, and that His design in taking human nature upon Him was that in that human nature He might atone for human guilt. He made "reconciliation for the sins of the people." Further, we have His *character* as High Priest described. He is merciful and He is faithful. Merciful—He must be merciful if He is to help us; He must have pity, heart-felt pity for the sins and miseries of man. And not only merciful but faithful: faithful to His promises, faithful to His word. "Hath He said and shall He not do it. Hath He spoken and shall He not make it good?" You can rely upon Him; He will not faint or be discouraged; if He has begun with you He will go on to the end. Lastly there is His *compassion*.

I use the word in its literal meaning to signify partnership in suffering. "In that He Himself hath suffered being tempted." How deeply did he share that suffering! What must it have been for Him, day after day, to endure the contradiction of sinners against Himself, to go out and give His testimony for God, and know that He would be met with scorn and contempt and misrepresentation and slander; and not only so, but that many of His own disciples would be found to walk no more with Him, and that, at last, out of His chosen band of twelve one should betray Him? One of the most pathetic incidents in His ministry is given in St. John vi., where, after that most divine and spiritual discourse on eating His Flesh and drinking His Blood, which some strangely imagined, as they do to-day, to mean a carnal eating and drinking, from that hour many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him. It was "a hard saying," they said, "who could hear it?"

At that hour Jesus turned to the twelve and said, "Will ye also go away?" His heart was wounded to the quick; He felt the desertion. Yes, He can sympathise with us in the hour of disappointment and desertion and difficulty, whatever it be, for "He Himself has suffered being tempted," and in this confidence of His sympathy and support let us be strong.



## CHAPTER XI

### ITS PRIVILEGES : SUPPLY

“My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”—PHIL. iv. 19.

It has been said that religion consists largely in possessive pronouns. The world can speak sometimes of providence, of the Deity and the Almighty, but you will never find a worldly man speak of God as his God, of the Eternal Father as his Father. Can we all say *my*? It stands on the threshold of every blessing that we must be able personally to claim our share in the love which God is so ready to reveal to every waiting soul. “My God.” It is the office of faith to underline, so to speak, the general assurances of God’s word and to make them particular. Faith puts in its personal claim to the promises. The Apostle here puts in his personal claim upon God as his God. There is no doubt in his heart he has a right to say it. It solves a thousand questions when we can say “My God.” Now here is a promise wide enough and broad enough to meet our case whatever it is.

First there is—

## I. THE NEED OF THE SUPPLY

How manifold our needs are ! What an indigent and needy creature is man, dependent upon his Maker for every breath he draws, dependent for his very support and protection—unable to take a step alone ! How helpless a child is born into the world ! How absolutely dependent upon others—a fit picture of the helplessness and weakness of man leaning wholly upon the grace, strength, and wisdom of God ! Man's needs are innumerable—needs temporal, needs spiritual, needs for the body, needs for the soul, needs for time, needs for eternity. You think of them and they seem a great deep ; you think of them and they seem like an ocean without shore. How can they be met ? Here is the answer—" My God shall supply all your need."

What is your need ? Is it *pardon* ? That is the first on the list of spiritual blessings. Well, that need may be supplied. God at infinite cost has provided a way of supplying that need ; He can multiply pardons, and His multiplication table will outdo yours. He has " cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." Not into the shallows, where the waves can throw them on the shore again, but into the depths, which no plumb-line can fathom, into those depths will the Lord God cast the sins of the repenting sinner. " With Him is plenteous redemption." It is not dealt out with a niggardly, stinting

hand. In God there is a fulness of grace like the fulness of the sea.

But we need more than pardon. As the hymn which we sometimes sing says, we need pardon, peace, power, purity, and paradise. The soul needs not only the peace of pardon, but the peace of *purity*. And here let me say that purity and peace are very closely associated. There is a peace of pardon, and there is also a peace of purity. We do not get that heart-rest for which our souls long without purification, because it is sin that so disturbs and troubles our rest and drags us down into the dust. Have you not again and again felt the terrible conflict within—that internecine war which seemed so hopeless? Oh, believe that Christ who has given you the peace of pardon can give you the peace of purity too. He can cleanse you from those terrible inward foes to peace. Let Him do it. Whatever there is in us that hinders peace—pride, selfishness, covetousness, all these are secret ills that lurk within the soul; let them go down before the incoming of Him who is the Prince of Peace. What a lovely title!

“Conquering kings their titles take  
From the foes they captive make;  
Jesus, by a nobler deed,  
From the thousands he hath freed.”

Christ brings with Him the blessings of peace, heart peace. As has been well said, there is one aspect

of peace which is connected with Christ's work—"He made peace by the blood of His cross;" but there is another which is linked with His government—"Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end."

Then after purity, there is *power*—the power to win a soul to Christ. Mr. Hudson Taylor once told me that we could not realise here in England what the power of Satan in a heathen country really was. He told a story of the overwhelming character of the awful spiritual power of evil which he once experienced in a lonely place in China. He was staying at a solitary inn, and found by the horrible din and noise in the rooms adjoining his own that the people were celebrating an idol festival; and it really seemed, he said, as if the air itself was thick with evil spirits, and all he could do was to fling himself out of bed on to the floor and cry to God for help and strength. It seemed to be a darkness which could literally be felt. Oh, I believe that we little know what we owe to Christ's salvation; even though we may be surrounded by so much that we have to deplore, we little know what is the utter darkness of a heathen land. We need power, do we not? We need it here at home, but still more do our friends abroad in the very hottest places of the field need it, and thanks be to God, the promise includes power—"My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

There are many other aspects of our need, but let us pass on to speak of—

## II. THE FOUNTAIN OF THE SUPPLY

*God Himself* is the fountain. This fact should silence every fear and banish every doubt. The grace of God is boundless, like the mighty ocean laving every shore. It is just as easy, says some one, for the ocean to bear up the great ships as it is for it to bear up a little boat. So is it just as easy for God to supply your great needs as your lesser ones. It is God Himself who is the fountain. The Deity is behind the promise, omnipotence and omniscience are engaged on your behalf. What a comfort! Oh, to believe it more!

Next we have—

## III. THE MEASURE OF THE SUPPLY

“According to His riches in glory by Jesus Christ.”

It has been well observed that it is not *out of* His riches. A Rothschild could give you sixpence, that would be *out of* his riches, but it would not be a very liberal present; but if he gave you *according to* his riches it would be a great deal. What is one man's wealth is another man's poverty. What is a great deal for one man to give is nothing at all for another. If a rich man gives *according to* his wealth, you may be assured of a very liberal supply. Now we are told here that God will give according to His

riches. It seems to open the door to infinity almost. Think how rich God is. How rich He is in *creation* ! He numbers the stars. "He calleth them all by names by the greatness of His might, for that He is strong in power ; not one faileth " (Isa. xl. 26).

How rich He is in *providence*. He controls everything by the word of His power, whether it is the destiny of an empire or the fall of a sparrow. God has a great many resources. We remember the story of the prophet. God had sent Elijah to Cherith, and during the drought he was to drink of the brook. But after a little while the brook dried up. What was Elijah to do then ? What a sad thing it would have been for Elijah if he had been dependent on the brook ! If you are drinking of some earthly stream and depending on its flow it may dry up, and then where are you ? But if you have God to fall back upon, your resources will never be exhausted. When the brook failed at Cherith, Elijah was sent somewhere else. What a blessed thing to have the providence of God to fall back upon !

How rich He is in *mercy*—"For His great love wherewith He hath loved us."

And how rich He is in *glory*. It has been remarked that in the promises relating to our sanctification you generally find the expression "riches in glory," whereas in promises relating to our forgiveness and conversion you generally find the words "riches in grace." Here is one illustration of it—"My God

shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory." Why, if it relates to our sanctification, should it be riches in glory? Because I think glory is grace triumphant. It is the idea of grace that has gone through the conflict and won; it is grace crowned with victory. Now the grace of which you and I have been made partakers has suffered every trial, endured every affliction, encountered every foe, overcome every temptation, vanquished every obstacle, and now in the Person of our glorious Lord is seated on the throne of God. It is glorified grace of which we are made partakers, therefore we ought not to be defeated. We have no right to be defeated, because the power that God can give us is a power that has conquered all our foes. They are all under His feet and they may be under ours if we will only believe it. I remember the story of a physician one of whose patients handed him an envelope containing as he supposed his ordinary fee. He did not look at it but put it in his pocket and forgot all about it. Shortly afterwards he went away on a journey, and one day remembered he had never examined the envelope. Taking it out he found it contained a cheque for £5000. He had it all the time but did not know it. We have a great deal more than £5000, if we have Christ, but I am afraid, as we said in a previous chapter, some of us do not know it and are living a pauper's life on a penny or two a day. May



God help us to understand what riches in glory we have in Christ, that we may live a little higher than we do. We need not be afraid of being too good. I never met any one in danger of that yet. The true account of the matter is very different ; it is given in the lines that follow :—

“How little of that road, my soul,  
How little hast thou gone !  
Take heart and let the thought of God  
Allure thee further on.”

There is one thing more—

#### IV. THE CHANNEL OF THE SUPPLY

You must have a channel. Though floods were granted they would be wasted without a channel. Rivers may flow within reach of a wilderness, but if there is no conduit to carry the water into it, they will not fertilise it. So the floods of heavenly grace must have a channel and that channel is found in *Christ Jesus*. “All the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him amen to the glory of God by us.” How is it that Christ is the channel ? First, He is so because the supply comes to us through the merits of His blood. We do not deserve it. All these riches are given to us for Christ’s sake. We are utterly unworthy to receive anything from God and never shall be worthy, but Christ is worthy and it is for His sake they are bestowed. But there is something else. The supply comes to us not only

because Christ is worthy but by virtue of our union with Christ. "The promises of God *in him* are yea and *in him* Amen." They are not in any one else. If you want the promises fulfilled take care that you abide in Christ. If you are not one with Christ and Christ with you there will be a failure of the supply for there will be an obstruction in the channel. Many years ago a friend of mine<sup>1</sup> who was staying in Switzerland, while walking along a steep mountain path, was struck by seeing that, of two streams which started high above him from the ~~same~~ glacier, one descended to the path along which he was walking, but the other stopped half way. Climbing up to discover the cause he found a big stone jammed half-way down the bed of the channel of the second stream, so that when the water struck it, it was dispersed over the face of the cliff, and thus did not descend any farther. If you have some sin, some hindrance between your soul and Christ, it will hinder the flow of His grace into your soul. Away with the stones. Gather out the stones and let the stream flow freely. Then you will have in your soul an assurance of the truth of His promise: "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

<sup>1</sup> Rev. E. H. Hopkins.

## CHAPTER XII

### ITS PRIVILEGES : SERVICE (I)

“Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you.”

—1 SAM. xii. 24.

[NOTE.—This verse carries me back to an incident in my ministry in London which I am never likely to forget and which I think it may be worth while to record. I had been far from well, and on the Sunday morning to which I am referring I knew very little about my sermon except that the text for it (the text at the head of this paper) had been given me. The morning too, broke gloomily, the rain was falling, and there were but few people in the streets. At such times depression is pretty sure to attack a minister. A wet Sunday, a thinned congregation, and the preacher wholly unfit for his work, are perhaps enough to cause it. Church-goers who take the Sunday sermon as a matter of course, or whose only idea in hearing it is to criticise the preacher, would be less exacting perhaps if they realised what preaching sometimes involves. “Who is sufficient for these things?” I, at any rate, was deeply conscious of insufficiency on this occasion, and should have been only too thankful to stand aside if a substitute had been forthcoming. Another circumstance contributed to the difficulties of the moment. Contrary to the advice of my friends, I had made radical changes in my choir. Hitherto a paid choir of boys had led the praises of the congregation, and I was assured that for a church situated as mine was in the heart of the West End such a choir was a necessity. Nevertheless I was not satisfied. I am far from condemning others, but for myself

I felt then, and I have always felt since, that spiritual worship can only be offered by spiritual worshippers, and that in the leading of the praises no less than in the reading of the prayers an effort at any rate should be made to secure them. So I had dismissed my choir and thrown myself upon God and upon the voluntary help of His people, asking only Christians to respond. Thirty names had come in, in response to my appeal, and this Sunday morning was to witness the inauguration of the new régime. How would it succeed? The boys of the former choir assembled in the gallery to witness the discomfiture of the new-comers. Predictions of failure were general. The Enemy of course was busy. In due time the service was proceeded with, and the sermon was preached. At the close a gentleman, who never did such a thing before or since, hurried to the vestry. "I think," he said, "you should speak to two persons who are waiting in church evidently in trouble." I went out and found a mother and daughter, the latter in great distress. I had the joy of pointing that soul to Christ that day, and on inquiry found that *the first hymn the choir sang* had been used to awaken her, while, as she said, "in the sermon every word seemed meant for her." There was one thing more. "Are you in the habit of attending this church?" I asked; "I do not seem to remember you." "Oh no," was the reply; "we never heard of the church before. We were going to another church, but as we came down Upper Berkeley Street *it came on to rain*, and I said, 'Mother, here is a church; let us go in here.'"

This is a long digression, but if it encourages a tired worker to believe that God condescends to notice the feeblest desire to render faithful service, that "out of weakness God can make him strong," and that in spite of appearances "God's weather never hinders God's work," it will not have been given in vain.]

It seems probable from the tenor of Samuel's address on this occasion that the people of Israel had entertained the idea that if a king was set over them

according to their request they would be in some measure released from their obligation to serve Jehovah. This, I think, lay at the root of the severe rebuke Samuel administers to them, for he calls their request for a king great wickedness—"Your wickedness is great which ye have done in the sight of the Lord in asking you a king" (ver. 17). At God's command, however, he told them that their request would be granted, but at the same time by the Lord's sending thunder and rain in wheat harvest—a thing unknown at such a time—he made them feel that whatever their outward circumstances as a nation might be, they were still absolutely dependent on God's power. No change of external conditions could affect their obligation to serve Him. With a king or without one they were in the hand of God, and to God they must bow. So deeply did Samuel's words and the unwonted exhibition of Divine power affect the consciences of the people that they feared for their lives and pleaded for Samuel's intervention on their behalf, but Samuel said—"Fear not : you have done all this wickedness," yet God will be merciful to you. "Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart : for consider how great things he hath done for you." In this verse we have, first, the service God demands, then the grounds on which He demands it, and lastly, how it is to be rendered. Now, first of all, what is—

## I. THE SERVICE GOD DEMANDS

There are three features suggested here. First, it must be single-hearted service—"Only fear the Lord." Then it must be true-hearted service—"Serve Him *in truth*." And lastly, it must be whole-hearted service—"Serve Him in truth *with all your heart*." First of all, it must be *single-hearted* service. "Only fear the Lord." We cannot render the service to God which He asks of us unless we have a single eye. We must be delivered from the fear of man and from the fear of the consequences of obedience.

"Fear Him, ye saints, and you will then  
Have nothing else to fear."

What a snare, what a hindrance to Christian work has been this spectre of fear, the fear of what others may say of us, the fear of what may happen to us if we follow the course which God demands. How many of Christ's servants have been kept back from faithful service by the influence of fear. It was said in the days of our Lord's ministry that "among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John xii. 42, 43). The eye was not single. "If thine eye be single thy whole body shall be

full of light. . . . But if the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness !” (Matt. vi. 22, 23). The man who can reach by the grace of God to that attitude—for it is only an attitude of the soul—that man is the most dependent man in the world and yet the most independent. He is the most dependent, for he is hanging upon the faithfulness and truth of God ; and he is also the most independent, for he is not living upon the changing breath of men’s opinion, he is not seeking to please men, but God which trieth the hearts. May God work in us singleness of heart in His holy service. Notice further that Christ’s service must be a *true-hearted* service—“ Serve Him *in truth*.” It was said of some of old that God was “ near in their mouth and far from their reins ” (Jer. xii. 2). But lip-service will never be accepted by the great Heart-Searcher. God is not concerned with the words of our lips. He is concerned with the condition and feelings of our hearts.

Have you noticed how very much Scripture has to say upon the condition of the heart of a man. “ As [a man] thinketh in his heart so is he ” (Prov. xxiii. 7). The heart covers really the whole inner moral region. The will, the affections, and the understanding, are all more or less embraced in the expression. In some places the heart stands for the conscience, as when we read that “ David’s heart smote him after that he had numbered the people ”



(2 Sam. xxiv. 10)—that was his conscience. In another place the heart is the affections—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart" (Deut. vi. 5). In other passages it is the will, as in 2 Kings x. 31, where it is written of Jehu that "he took no heed to walk in the law of God with all his heart." In others it is the understanding, as in Ps. xiii. 2, where the Psalmist takes counsel in his soul and has sorrow in his heart. The whole moral region, in fact, is covered by the expression. Well, God requires truth in the inward parts. What a remarkable statement is that of David in the fifty-first Psalm: "Behold thou desirest truth in the inward parts" (Ps. li. 6). Is not that very often just where truth is not found? "When he speaketh fair believe him not: for there are seven abominations in his heart" (Prov. xxvi. 25).

Truth in the inward parts is what God wants, and though the standard is high, let us remember that in the Gospel all that is demanded is given; and therefore if God desires it He is pledged to bestow it, and it need not discourage us in the least degree to know that He requires it. If we have not truth in the inward parts let us go and ask God to put it there. He has undertaken to do it, and I think we shall all with one voice reply that it is well that He has, for if He had not it would never be done. But that is what He does expect of us—truth in the inward parts; that is, He wants Chris-

tians who are through-and-through Christians. I am reminded by the expression of an utterance I once heard from a remarkable woman, whose autobiography has appeared lately—I mean Amanda Smith, the coloured evangelist. I recollect on one occasion she spoke at the Keswick Convention and gave a wonderful account of the Lord's dealings with her. A gentleman afterwards went up to her and said, "Mrs. Smith, I have this difficulty and I have that difficulty, and I have this wrong in my heart, and that wrong in my life." She answered in her quaint way, "I dare say you have, sir, but mine is a *through-and-through* salvation, sir."

I have often thought what a blessing it is to believe in a through-and-through salvation. "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly"—*through-and-through*, as the German version of that verse gives it. Well, God wants us to be true in the inward recesses of the heart, not to be merely veneered and stuccoed Christians. David said, "Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." There is a great difference, says Mr. Bardsley in his "Illustrated Texts," between a snowdrift and a whited wall. "Chip off the thin coating of whitewash from the wall and you come to a darker substance beneath. Dig deeply into a snow-drift and it is *white right through*." The Lord make us white all through. God wants true-hearted service: "Serve Him in truth with all your hearts."

An old Puritan writer contrasts the hypocrite with the true Christian after this fashion. He says true Christians are often like apples kept in a dusty loft, for they live in a wicked world, where they get dusty, and so must be dusted and pared before they are fit for use, but still they are sound at the core ; but hypocrites are like the apples of Sodom, fair without but ashes within. God wants truthfulness. May He find it in our service.

There is an awful danger of formality even among true servants of Christ. Familiarity breeds contempt. I have heard mission preachers who are constantly conducting missions lament the danger they have found creeping over them of falling into a mechanical way of uttering the most solemn truths. There is nothing you or I need more than to be kept fresh, to be kept in touch with Him Who is the source and fountain of freshness : “ All my fresh springs are in thee ” (Ps. lxxxvii. 7. P.B.V.). Then again the service which God asks of His children is *whole-hearted* service. “ Serve Him in truth *with all your heart.* ” As if it were possible to serve Him with a certain measure of truth and yet not with unreserved and entire devotion—a partial service. I think these warnings, though their first application undoubtedly is to the mere professor, have yet an important bearing upon true Christians too. Do we always serve the Lord with all our heart ? Can we say

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and *all that is within me* bless his holy name.” A great deal must take place in the history of any Christian before he is able to say, “All that is within me bless His holy name.” It too often happens that there is a great deal within that rebels against God’s holy name. But this must be put right if we are to serve God acceptably. You remember when Darius proposed to Alexander the Great that they should divide the world between them, Alexander answered, “There is only room for one sun in the heavens.”

This claim of undivided dominion is arrogant ambition in the creature, but it is necessary in the Creator. God can brook no rival. He will never divide the empire of our souls, He must be all or nothing. Many would have Christ to reign over them if He would consent to occupy the position the Romans wished to assign to Him. They offered him a niche in their Pantheon. They were quite willing to let him stand side by side with Jove and Mercury and the rest, but when they heard that He must be all or nothing they would have none of Him. It is the same to-day. Thousands would welcome Christ if only He would be content to stand side by side with their idols. It is the exclusiveness of Christianity which they hate. During the great American War between North and South, on one occasion Commissioners from the Southern States met President Lincoln on board one of the great river steamers

to consult whether it was possible to put an end to the awful carnage which was drenching the land with blood. At that time the fortunes of war still hung in suspense : they could scarcely say on which side victory seemed to incline. The Commissioners met, a map of the States was laid out before them, and they began their appeal. Lincoln was known to be a humane, moderate, and Christian man, and they appealed to his sympathies. They pictured the miseries the war had brought, the desolate hearths, the weeping of orphan children, the wail of widows going up from ruined homes, the waste of blood and treasure, the march of the opposing armies carrying desolation and death wherever they went. They appealed to the President to end their miseries. They pointed out on the map of the country this and that concession which they were willing to make if only the North would consent that they should retain some portion of the territory for which they were fighting.

The President listened to the speeches in silence, and when all had spoken, slowly and deliberately, with a grave look in his face, he brought down his hand on the map, and said, "Gentlemen, this Government must have all!" That closed the interview. Much as he deplored the horrors of war he knew well that to allow it to end before it had accomplished its purpose would be to leave the way open for future conflicts and would perpetuate the

miseries of the slavery which he had determined to abolish. It seems to me that Christ still speaks in similar terms to every divided heart. Wherever there is an effort to serve two masters, wherever there is an idol which takes the place of the rightful King, there it seems to me Christ is waiting until all has been said that can be said in favour of the compromise, and then, His loving, pierced hand will be laid upon the heart, and, if there be ears to hear, the still, small voice of the Spirit will be heard saying, "This Government must have all!" Are we prepared that Christ should have all—our name, our reputation, our talents, our time? Are we prepared truly, in the sense in which He demands it, to lay all at His feet? Nothing less than this is the service He expects from us. Nothing less than this may He enable us to render. In a few words let me indicate—

## II. THE GROUNDS UPON WHICH THIS APPEAL IS BASED

Samuel prefaces it with an important word. "*Consider*," he says. That is just what men will not do. Half the battle would be gained if men would consider. So in another place God speaks of His erring people in "O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end" (Deut. xxxii. 29). Now, says Samuel, God is making a large demand upon you,



but it is a reasonable demand. It will bear consideration—"Consider how great things He hath done for you."

"To God be the glory, great things He hath done.  
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son."

God has done great things for us. He has done *great things in providence*. Think of the temporal blessings with which He has surrounded us. He is our Creator and our Provider; in Him we live and move and have our being; by Him we are upheld; every blessing we receive and every bounty we enjoy is from the loving, liberal hand of our Father in heaven. If we could claim to be the authors of our own being, if we could say our life and health and breath were our own, then we might have something to reply when He asks for all. But, seeing that every breath we draw is in the hand of Him Who made us, seeing that we are dependent upon Him for life and breath and all things, then, apart from redemption's claims altogether, God has a right to all we are and have. How much more when we consider what He has done for us *in redemption*. At a great price has He ransomed us: "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter i. 18, 19). Surely if He has thus bought us He has a right to



us. Shall we keep back a part of His purchased possession ? Finally, *He Himself is infinitely worthy to receive all*. Let me quote a text which has often thrilled my heart. “And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders : and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands ; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing” (Rev. v. 11, 12). When Mary in the days of old came with her alabaster box of very precious ointment, and breaking it at His feet lavished it on Him, the disciples, instigated by Judas (*Cf.* Matt. xxvi. 8, with John xii. 4), said, “To what purpose is this waste ?” But Christ virtually replied—It is no waste to give your best to me—“Why trouble ye the woman ? She hath done what she could. . . . Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.” Christ is worthy. We shall never regret any sacrifice we are permitted to make for Him. Lastly—

### III. HOW IS THIS SERVICE TO BE RENDERED ?

How can we get this single heart, this true heart, this whole heart for God ? Certainly it is not in our

power to offer it, but Christ is able to prepare it for us. "The preparations of the heart in man are from the Lord" (Prov. xvi. 1). This heart which God demands must be first a *pardoned heart*. Next, it must be a *purified heart* (Jer. iv. 14). Then it must be a *heart in which Christ Himself condescends to dwell* (Eph. iii. 17). I tell you that under the Gospel all that is demanded is given; therefore when we read a demand like this we bring our poor hearts, such as they are, to the feet of Christ and say—O Lord, pardon us for the past, for all the failures in our service; purify us in the present that we may be fitted for Thy use, and then come Thyself and dwell in us that we may be kept in the future single-hearted, true-hearted, and whole-hearted servants of the best of masters. May God grant it for Christ's sake! Amen.

## CHAPTER XIII

### ITS PRIVILEGES : SERVICE (II)

"We do not well; this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace."—2 KINGS, vii. 9.

THE great end of salvation is service. We are "saved to serve," some in the quiet life of home, some in the forefront of the battle in the foreign field. In this striking story of Samaria's siege I think we may find a stimulus to missionary service. In it we see reflected—

#### I. THE DISTRESS OF THE WORLD

Samaria was a beautiful city as it lay shining in the sun, but oh, what misery and distress was to be found within its walls! And this world is fair and glorious to see, but how great the darkness which has covered it, and in which thousands of our fellow-creatures are sitting to-day.

Three words perhaps may suffice to describe at once the condition of things in Samaria, and the condition of things in the heathen world to-day. The first is *fear*. The inhabitants of the town were in dread of their lives; their enemies with a ring of steel had beset them round. They feared to take a

step ; they were in bondage as grievous as that under which their forefathers had laboured in Egypt long ago. They were under the power of an enemy—"an enemy had done this ;" the kings of Syria were oppressing them, grinding them down beneath their iron heel. And what is the condition of heathendom to-day ? Is it not literally a condition of dread ? The religions of heathen nations—if they can be called religions—are little else but superstitions engendered by fear. Take the religions of Asia, and the testimony of an authority such as the great traveller, Mrs. Bishop, concerning them. What does she say ? "Belief in demons underlies the religions of India and China. Demons are ceaselessly propitiated in the homes—in the seclusion of the women's houses. They were believed to produce all ills." If it be true of Asia it is doubly true of Africa. Read the terrible miseries inflicted by the witch doctors upon their victims, and we see that it is in fear that the hapless inhabitants pass their existence.

The second characteristic of this distress was *foulness*. The awful condition of things during the siege of Samaria defies description, and the awful depths of iniquity to which human nature can descend in heathen lands is too horrible for words. Read such a book as that entitled "Things as They Are,"<sup>1</sup> and you will be able to form some idea of what heathenism really is. Whatever good there may

<sup>1</sup> By Miss A. Carmichael.

have been in any of the ancient religious systems seems to have died out of them. "Buddhism," says Mrs. Bishop, "has decayed in its teaching and morality; Hinduism has descended to a degradation of which one cannot speak. Morality in many cases is but a name; confidence between man and man is utterly lost; lies were not a shame even when found out." In fact, the state of the heathen world is nothing better than a putrefying sore.

One thing more is needed to complete the picture, and that is *famine*. In Samaria the people were reduced to the severest straits; exorbitant prices were charged for the most loathsome and disgusting articles which served for food; cannibalism in its most revolting form was perpetrated by an unnatural mother to allay the pangs of hunger. But awful as this picture is, it does not represent so pressing a need for the bread which perishes as that of the heathen world for the Bread which endureth to everlasting life. Where there is no vision the people perish, and it is literally true that where Christ the Bread of Life is not proclaimed men starve in the midst of plenty. But there is, thank God, another side to the picture. In the story we see also—

## II. THE DELIVERANCE OF CHRIST

It is beautifully typified here. The first thing to note about it is that it is *ample*. These lepers who went into the camp ate their full and took away

abundance of provisions they could not use. There was plenty. And so with the redemption of Jesus Christ there is a wideness like the wideness of the sea ; there is a fulness in Christ which can meet our every need. Christ is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

But further, this deliverance was *already accomplished*. The Lord had made the enemy to hear the sound of a great host and they had fled in confusion. That is the most remarkable thing about the whole story—the deliverance was accomplished but the people did not know it. It was done, but they were utterly unaware of the fact. It is so still. Christ has procured deliverance for us. He has obtained eternal redemption for us, and there is no need for us to attempt to obtain it. Already it has been accomplished for us on the Cross—the deliverance from our sins, and from the power of evil which we need—it is for us to claim it with a courageous faith, that refuses to be denied. But, alas ! thousands and millions have never heard that it is so. All things are ready, but the invitation to the feast has not reached them.

One thing more, this provision was *accessible*. They had but to turn out of the gates on hearing the news to find it close at hand. And it is true to say that in the days in which we live the facilities of communication are such that the Gospel of Christ

has become accessible in a way it never was before to the very ends of the earth. If the natives cannot come to it, it can be taken to them, and that in itself constitutes one of the great calls to the duty which the Church has to recognise and obey. So finally we have—

### III. THE DUTY OF THE CHURCH

What was it for these men ? It was to tell those who were in need of the salvation that was ready for them. What can be more significant than that they who brought the message were lepers. Can God make use of lepers ? Thanks be to God He can, for lepers we all by nature are ; but here the illustration fails, for it is God's plan to cleanse the leper before He uses him. First cleansing, then commission. Still we are to learn a lesson from the lepers. Observe the motives which actuated them in the discharge of their mission. There was the motive of *gratitude*. They had feasted on the abundance provided, surely from thankfulness for the gifts received they should pass on the news to those less favoured than themselves ? And there was the motive of *compassion*. What ! could they bear to think of the awful scenes that were being enacted within the gates of Samaria and remain unmoved ? There was also the motive of *justice*. They felt those good things were meant for others as well as for themselves. They were debtors, as Paul said ; they owed



it to others to tell of the blessings that had been given to them. And lastly, there was the motive of *fear*. "We do not well," they say. "If we tarry till the morning light some mischief will come upon us." Yes, it is a duty as well as a privilege to declare the news. "Woe unto me," says the apostle, "if I preach not the gospel." Necessity is laid upon me; I must proclaim it to others and tell them of that which has brought light and deliverance to my own soul.

Here is our object lesson. Let us take it to our hearts, and seek, whether directly in the mission field ourselves, or indirectly by strengthening the hands of those who go, to do what we can to tell out the good tidings of Christ's love to dying men.

## CHAPTER XIV

### ITS PRIVILEGES : SERVICE (III.)

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.”

—2 COR. iv. 7.

ST. PAUL sometimes magnified his office but he never magnified himself. With what humility he speaks ! “We preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord ; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake ” (ver. 5). He magnifies his theme but he thinks little of himself. We have a treasure indeed, he says, but it is in an earthen vessel. It is a suggestive figure this of the treasure and the vessel ; let us dwell on it for a few moments.

First of all—

#### I. WHAT IS IT ?

What are we to understand by the treasure ? Some refer it to St. Paul’s ministry, others to the Gospel which he preached, but in either case the sum and substance of the treasure is the same—it is Christ Jesus Himself. It is “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” This knowledge is indeed a treasure. It is

so, *because it is valuable in itself*. This, I suppose, is the first mark of a treasure that it is intrinsically valuable. Sometimes men's treasures are silver and gold, but they need not necessarily be so. When the mother of the Gracchi was asked in days of old for her treasures she pointed to her two noble sons and said, "There are my jewels." But the Christ we have outshines all others: "He is fairer than the children of men." "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." "In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." He is the Pearl of Great Price, "the chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely." But again, Christ is a treasure not only because He is valuable in Himself but *because He is highly prized by those who know Him*. It has often happened that possessions in themselves of little value have nevertheless been treasures to their owner, while, on the other hand, jewels of priceless worth, through ignorance of their true value, have been lightly esteemed. But Christ is a treasure both on the ground of what He is and of the estimation in which He is held. It is true that thousands have made light of Him, but that is because men are ignorant of His priceless worth. If you would know His value you must ask how He is esteemed by the best judges. Hear the verdict of Heaven—"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Hear the verdict of the Church—"Whom have we in

heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that we desire in comparison of Thee." Tried by this test of love to Christ how does your Christianity stand? Paul says, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ my Lord" (Phil. iii. 8). Can we say as much? Is Christ nearer than your nearest, and dearer than your dearest? Is He the light of your life? What have you ever done to show your love for Him? Have you ever suffered anything for Him? Have you ever hazarded anything for Him? Is your life such as would lead men to suppose that Christ was your treasure? But again, *the idea of a treasure carries with it the thought of something which enriches others.* Christ is a treasure not only because He is precious in Himself, but because He enriches those who love Him. Christ is an enriching treasure. He never fails. No man who really trusts Him will be suffered to remain in spiritual poverty. His people are often poor in this world, but they have the true riches, for He is His own best gift.

"Give what Thou wilt, without Thee I am poor;  
And with Thee rich, take what Thou wilt away."

Does our life, like Solomon's, attract others by its wealth? Would others think from our life and conversation that our Lord was "rich unto all that call upon him?" (Rom. x. 12). Remember "the Christian is the only man who can never live up to his income." I am afraid we have often for-

gotten to draw upon our Heavenly Treasurer. Have we never been, as some one says, like the robins in winter who pick up the crumbs but shun the hand that scatters them, glad enough to have the gifts, but caring little about the giver. If so, surely we dishonour our Lord.

But notice next where this treasure is placed.

## II. WHERE IS IT ?

“We have this treasure in *earthen vessels*.” It has been well remarked that when God gave the law by the disposition of angels, it might have been said it was put in gold and silver vessels. But since the Gospel has been entrusted to you and me, it is certainly true that it is put in *earthen vessels*. It seems a strange receptacle for such a treasure. An earthen vessel ! What does it mean ? It speaks to us, first, of *poverty and baseness of material*. An earthen vessel is made of very poor stuff, and so are we. We live in houses of clay, “our foundation is in the dust” (Job. iv 19), we are “crushed before the moth.” Poor humanity, it is a very weak, battered thing at best. “God knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust” (Ps. ciii. 14), and it is a very good thing for us to be reminded of it too. Weakness and infirmity characterise us. I know that there is a power which can lift us above our infirmities, but this does not alter the fact that the infirmities are there. Then again, an earthen vessel

is made of very *brittle* material. Thus it is predicted of Christ, that He shall dash His enemies to pieces "like a potter's vessel" (Ps. ii. 9). Every mistress of a household knows the fragility of earthen vessels. We have often lamented over broken china. But what a wonderful thing it is that the Lord can use even broken china, nay, that He often has to break us before He can use us. You remember what Pastor Theodore Monod once said about that, "There are many who pray 'Lord, take me and make me,' but they don't say 'Lord, take me and **BREAK** me and make me,' " and yet it often happens that without the breaking there can be no making. This leads me to one more thought about the vessel. I mean the *wisdom and skill of its construction*. We are clay but we are *fashioned* clay. But then the processes—are we prepared for them? This clay must be broken on the wheel; ah, yes, and God has many wheels. Some of God's best saints have been broken on the wheel in every age. After the breaking comes the fashioning, after the fashioning comes the colouring, and it is no easy matter to lay those colours on. I read an account some time ago of a visit to the porcelain factories at Worcester. I cannot recall the details, but I know that the vases were thrust into the furnace that the colours traced upon them might be burnt in. God has oftentimes to put us into the furnace before He can make the graces of His Spirit permanent in our lives.

The fire is tempered to a red heat, and the clay is not spared till the process is complete; and they say that that china which is to have the highest honour by-and-by goes through the fiercest fire, and goes through it oftenest. Some kinds of clay cannot bear so much heat as others, and these do not produce such fine results. "The fining pot is for silver, but the furnace for gold." We must not shrink from the fire, the severer the fire the more glorious the result will be. Lastly we ask

### III. WHY IS IT

that the treasure is found in such unlikely keeping? Why is it in an "earthen vessel?" Why has the jewel such a poor setting? "Why is not the picture in a better frame?" It is not difficult to tell you why. Most of us, no doubt, have heard of Leonardo da Vinci's picture of the Last Supper. It is a wonderful painting. When it was completed the artist invited a friend to see his masterpiece. "What do you think of it?" asked Leonardo. "I am so struck," said his friend, "with that wonderfully embossed silver cup on the table." Whereupon the great painter seized his brush, and, to the dismay and horror of his friend, with a succession of rapid strokes dashed out the cup from the picture. "What are you doing?" said his friend. "Every eye," replied Da Vinci, "must be fixed on Christ. Nothing must divert the spectator from the vision of the



Lord. If the cup stands in the way it must disappear." Is not this why we have the treasure in earthen vessels. It is that every eye may be fixed upon Christ; it is that God may have the glory and not you and me; it is that the thoughts of men may centre not upon the vessel but upon the treasure, not upon Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, but upon Christ. The apostle himself gives the reason—"We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us." Have we never been tempted to say, "If it were not for that flaw in the vessel, if it were not for that difficulty in my circumstances, if it were not for that crook in the lot, if it were not for that troublesome person I have to meet, if it were not for that trial in the home, if it were not for that physical weakness, if it were not for that unfortunate surrounding, I could be so much more useful than I am, I could do so much better work in the world." Do not be too sure. It may well be that your weakness is your strength. It was not until the alabaster box was broken that the house was filled with the odour of the ointment; it was not until Gideon's clay pitchers were shattered that the light shone out which alarmed the foe. A great many of us, I am convinced, are too strong for God to use. He does not want our strength, He wants our weakness, and He has to deal with us as He did with Gideon's army, bringing us down until it is

clear to all men that the excellency of the power is of God and not of us. Power is wanted in the Church to-day, but it is not the power of intellect, it is not the power of organisation, it is not even the power of money, the power that is needed is the power of the Holy Ghost.

What do we know of this heavenly power? Our weakness is great, but it is in weakness that the heavenly power is manifested. May that power be yours and mine for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

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## CHAPTER XV

### ITS PRIVILEGES : SUCCESS

“ Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them ; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.”—JOHN xx. 23.

THESE are momentous words ; around them in every age a controversy has gathered. It is hardly too much to say that the lines of cleavage which have so sadly and successfully divided Christendom may be more readily traced to the diverse interpretations of this than of any other passage in the New Testament. In our own day, so recently as December 1901, a Round Table Conference held at Fulham testified once more to the importance that attaches to them and to the profound interest they awaken—and to those who have not seen it I would cordially commend the Report of the Conference,<sup>1</sup> which will be found to repay the most careful perusal. Turning to the passage itself let us look first at the persons addressed, then at the principles asserted, and lastly at the powers which are conferred.

#### I. THE PERSONS ADDRESSED

Who were they ? The usual reply is the Apostles

<sup>1</sup> Longmans & Co., 2s. 6d.

and their successors. But is this so? We owe it to Bishops Lightfoot and Westcott in later days, though the fact is obvious to every careful reader of the Gospels, that such a limitation of the passage cannot be sustained. A comparison of the passage with Luke xxiv. 33 makes it clear that the solemn commission was addressed not to a sacred tribe within the Church but to the Church itself, not to a separate order of men but the Christian Society as a whole.<sup>1</sup> Probably there were women present, as we learn from Acts i. 14 they were on a later occasion. The grave importance of this contention to the correct view of the passage will be seen at a glance. If it be true, the claims of what is known as sacerdotalism are shattered at a stroke. If the privileges here indicated, whatever they are, are not to be regarded as the exclusive prerogative of the minister, but are to be shared by the people, then, although it is quite intelligible that the society may elect to exercise its privileges through its officers, yet the powers themselves reside not in the officers but in the society; and this is just what has been demonstrated unanswerably by the late Bishop Lightfoot in his famous essay on the Christian ministry, viz., that the Church of Christ has no sacerdotal order, and that it is of the very essence of Christianity that

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that at the late Conference at Fulham, in which all schools of thought in the Church were represented, this most important point was universally conceded.

those privileges, which under the Mosaic economy were entrusted to a sacred tribe, viz., the Levites, as the representatives of the people, should now revert to the Church as a whole. In strict accordance with this view we find in the New Testament priesthood predicated of the Church at large (1 Pet. ii. 5; Rev. i. 5), but never of an order of men within it. In the list of Church gifts, the gifts of the Ascension, recorded in Ephesians iv. 11, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are duly enumerated, but there is a significant silence as to the office of the sacrificing priest in the newly constituted Body of Christ. It follows that the whole system of private confession and absolution, which is one of the foundation stones of sacerdotalism, is destitute of any real Scriptural authority or warrant. The distinction between the Priest under the Old Testament and the Christian Minister under the New Testament was once clearly presented to the writer by a Bishop of our own Church in these terms : "The Priest of the Old Testament approached God on behalf of the people, the Minister of the New Testament approaches the people on behalf of God. 'Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us : we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God ' " (2 Cor. v. 20).

This witness is true. And let it not be thought that in contending for its truth we are undermining, as some imagine, the foundation on which the in-

stitution of the Christian Ministry rests. It is not as some, in the weakness of human nature, ever prone to extremes, seem to suppose, that there are no officers in the Church of Christ, that there is no solemn setting apart of individuals for sacred duties, that there are no distinct orders of ministry. Nothing could be further from the truth. To such an objection the list just quoted from Ephesians iv. is a sufficient answer. The Church of Christ is not left a confused mob, as sheep without shepherds. The Christian ministry is divinely appointed. It is continued with apostolic recognition and with Church authority (see 1 Tim. v. 22; 2 Tim. ii. 2; Titus i. 5, &c.) and is designed to last throughout the Christian dispensation until the Chief Shepherd shall appear (1 Pet. v. 1-4). But an ordained ministry is one thing, a sacrificing priesthood is another. In vindicating the first we must be careful to disclaim the second, lest we trench on the prerogatives of our Great High Priest and deny or dishonour the finality of His sacrifice. Thus far we have been concerned only with the question of the reception of these powers by the society rather than by a privileged class within it. But it is also necessary to emphasise the character of the society to which they were entrusted, and this brings us to notice—

## II. THE PRINCIPLES IMPLIED

in the circumstances of the bestowal of this great

commission. It is of the first importance to observe that at the time it was granted all who composed the society were true disciples. There were no hypocrites in the upper room. Judas had gone to his own place.

*Sincerity* is the first mark of those to whom Christ entrusts the ministry of reconciliation. These words are not to be taken as applying to any but true believers. Mere professors are not contemplated here. The traitor spirit must be cast out before Christ will speak His word of Peace. Yes, notice it, it is *to the Church at peace* that these words are spoken. Not till the risen Lord had assured the feeble and unworthy band of His forgiveness, not until He had pointed to His scarred hands and side as procuring their redemption, was the commission given. It is the same still. Peace must precede power. Peace purchased at the tremendous cost of a Redeemer's blood. It is to those thus reconciled to God, and to those alone, that powers thus solemn are entrusted. Nor is this all. We read, and the statement is full of meaning, "He breathed on them and saith to them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." However we regard this action, whether as symbolic of a future conveyance of power or as signifying an actual conveyance of it, we at least learn that it is not only to the Church in peace but to *the Church in the Spirit* that these instructions are addressed. Without the Holy Ghost no one is qualified to discharge these solemn responsibilities. It is just here that such sad



failure has been witnessed. Unspiritual men have attempted to discharge spiritual functions, and the result has been disaster. To what other cause can we attribute the confusion which distresses the Church of Christ to-day but to the fact that the world is in the Church and the Church too often in the world? The spectacle of men unrenewed in heart and life relying on a supposed mechanical succession from the Apostles, while departing from apostolic faith and powerless to perform apostolic works, is a sight to make angels weep and the hosts of hell rejoice. Nay, even to the faithful worker the message comes, "Tarry ye, until ye be endued with power from on high," for without the power the work cannot be done, and the words are addressed not only to the Church in power, but to *the Church at work*. Sincerity, spirituality, service are the three marks which characterise these Easter Day believers. They were not only sanctified but *sent*. "Son, go work" is the risen Saviour's word, addressed not to apostles only, but to every Christian—go spread the news—go bid men's sorrows cease—go tell the world that Christ has conquered death and hell—go gather in the harvest of weary souls—see, I send you, "as the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you" (John xx. 21). This is the cause for which the Church exists. She has no other business rightly understood than this to carry everywhere the message of her Lord, by life, by lip, by pen, by gift, to manifest

His love to men. She has inherited her Master's Name, and with it something, at any rate, of her Master's mission. Like Him she is in the world but not of it. Like Him she is to go into it to bring it back to its rightful Lord. Never will she understand her privileges until she thus answers to her call. It is when actually at work for God that the meaning of these solemn words unfolds. The writer has heard them pleaded in scenes of Christian service as far removed from the suspicion of sacerdotalism as it is possible to imagine, and never have they been used with more effect. But it is time to inquire into them more closely, and to examine a little more at length.

### III. THE POWERS CONFERRED

in this great commission. The first thing to observe is that in Matthew xvi. 19 we find the powers of binding and loosing closely associated with the Power of the Keys—our Lord's words to St. Peter, "I give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven," and are immediately followed, not, as we should have expected, by some such phrase as "Thou shalt shut and no man open," &c., but "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." We infer therefore that the Power of the Keys and the power of binding and loosing are to some extent at any rate equivalent. Without doubt,

to Peter belongs the first place in the exercise of this power, when he opened the door of Faith to the Gentiles, and that both he and the apostolic college possessed qualifications which were not entrusted to the Church at large is equally certain; yet there is a subordinate sense in which every minister of Christ in the discharge of his office, and even every true servant of Christ has a share in this power of binding and loosing as occasion may arise.

Another point to be remembered, as was pointed out by the Rev. T. W. Drury in the Lambeth Conference, is that these words were originally addressed to Jews, and that to understand them we must inquire how Jews would have naturally interpreted them. Now we find as a matter of fact there were Jewish customs with which the disciples were perfectly familiar, and to which they would certainly understand these expressions to refer. Guided by this clue we may safely say that in the first instance these words were intended to convey what we may call—

1. *Doctrinal powers*, that is, power and authority to teach. It would seem that every Jewish lawyer on completing his term of studies and satisfying the tests of efficiency imposed, was presented by his tutors with a key as a symbol of the knowledge which he now possessed, and was supposed to be able to impart. It is to this custom our Lord refers in His reproach to the lawyers, "Woe

unto you lawyers! for ye have taken away *the key of knowledge*: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered" (Luke xi. 52).

The key was given them to unlock the treasury of God's word and communicate its riches, but they not only failed to dispense them themselves, they closed the door to others whose earnestness in the quest of truth should have put them to shame. *Power to teach*, this is the first meaning of the Power of the Keys. How wonderfully it was exercised, any one reading St. Peter's sermon at Pentecost can discover. Here was an "unlearned and ignorant" (Acts iv. 13) fisherman giving expositions of the Scriptures which the wisest Rabbi would certainly not have dreamed of attempting. Here we find him unlocking the treasure-house of the Psalter and discovering to the astonished eyes of his hearers the unsearchable riches of Christ which lie hidden therein.

Which of the Rabbis could have ascribed Psalm xvi. to Christ, or once more affirmed Psalm cx. to be fulfilled in the Ascension?

Certainly this discovery of Christ in Scripture is one illustration of the exercise of the Power of the Keys. But further in the commission of binding and loosing, retaining and remitting, there are included—

2. *Disciplinary powers*. The Church is not only empowered to teach. She is entitled to pass judg-

ment.<sup>1</sup> In the Jewish usage of earlier days this power of judgment seems to have referred not to persons but to things; *e.g.* we read that Rabbi Shamma "bound," *i.e.* prohibited all heathen learning in his school, while, on the other hand, Rabbi Hillel "loosed" it, *i.e.* permitted it to be taught. But the terms of the Saviour's Commission "Whose soever sins ye remit," &c., are expressly applicable to persons. It is certain, therefore, that they include the idea not only of pronouncing judgment upon disputed questions, but also of exclusion and restoration to communion of individuals. The Church has the power to pronounce sentence of exclusion upon offenders and remit that sentence upon their repentance; and such decisions if taken as they are intended to be taken under the guidance of the Holy Spirit will be ratified in heaven.

Instances of the exercise of this power in apostolic days will occur to every reader of the Epistles. The most notable is found in 1 Cor. v. where the case of a grievous offender in the Corinthian Church is dealt with, and the Church is blamed for not having already put away from among themselves the wicked person (vers. 2 and 13).

No doubt these powers of discipline have been

<sup>1</sup> A notable instance of this power is furnished by the first Council of Jerusalem in Acts xv. when Peter and the rest of the apostles "bound," *i.e.* forbade, the enforcement of circumcision on Gentile believers, and their decision was ratified in heaven (ver. 24-28).

most terribly abused. The interdict, the ban of excommunication by the Church in the Middle Ages which laid whole countries desolate, and cut off individuals and communities not only from the ordinances of religion, but from the very means of subsistence at the caprice of a haughty ecclesiastic in the papal chair, these, indeed, furnish an awful illustration of the proverbial saying, *Depravatio optimi pessima*, but the very abuse, terrible as it was, points to the existence of legitimate powers somewhere. It has often been said that discipline in some form or other is a great need in the church-life of to-day—and there is no doubt it is. But how to revive it and safeguard it is a question not easily solved. I should like, however, to make a practical suggestion which, at least, seems worth recording.

It is that a higher standard of spiritual fitness than is often thought necessary now should be demanded at the admission of candidates for Confirmation. Confirmation, in the Church of England at any rate, is the Gate of Communion, and if that gate were more vigilantly guarded, though the number (on the yearly roll of candidates) might be less, the results of Confirmation would be infinitely more, and the Church would gain in the quality of its membership what it might for a time appear to lose in quantity. At any rate the scandal which is now sometimes presented by Confirmation synchronising rather with a formal entrance—a “coming out”—



into Society than a coming out on the Lord's side would be avoided. But we have not yet approached what is after all the most important meaning of this great commission. It was well observed by Canon Aitken at the Fulham Conference that it was hardly conceivable that the first thought of our Lord in addressing His disciples on an occasion so unique and momentous as this His first interview with them after His resurrection from the dead, would be merely to confer upon them disciplinary powers. Surely His heart and theirs would be full of thoughts and purposes infinitely higher than this. Had He not risen victorious from the tomb? Was He not the Conqueror of Hades and of Death? Nay, had He not just achieved the mighty work of human Redemption? and must not His first message to His followers be directly concerned with it? When He said, "Whose soever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them," He meant something more than the exclusion or the restoration of an offender to Communion in the visible Church. He meant at that hour to bestow on His Church not only disciplinary but—

3. *Declaratory Powers.* In fact St. Luke himself interprets the Commission thus, when he gives as the Master's charge in this very interview "that repentance and remission of sins *should be preached* in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke xxiv. 47). It is in the preaching of the Gospel,



in the declaration that there is pardon for the vilest on repentance and return to God through Christ, that this great Commission is exercised, and, as has been often urged, it was in this way the Apostles understood it. In the administration of the sacraments, but above all in the preaching of the Gospel, they set themselves at once to their great enterprise. In the words of St. Mark, "They went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following" (Mark xvi. 20). If this be so, where, we may well ask, is there any authority for the practice of private confession and absolution, which this passage is often supposed to countenance? There is no instance in the Acts or Epistles of the Apostles establishing confession as the practice is now understood, or even of commending it to their followers.

The Power of the Keys was exercised by Peter, not by a private absolution of Cornelius, but by a public proclamation of the Gospel (Acts x.). St. Paul bound the unbeliever and loosed the penitent, not by establishing the confessional, but by declaring that "through this man" (Christ Jesus), was preached to His hearers forgiveness of sins, and by Him all that believe were justified from all things" (Acts xiii. 38).

This is the view taken in our own Church of England formularies. The absolution pronounced by our ministers is declaratory in form. It affirms that

God "hath given power and commandment to his ministers to *declare* and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins," and accordingly the minister goes on to say, "He," (not the servant but Master), "pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe His holy Gospel." The Apostles, that is, and our Church following in their steps, declare *who they are* whose sins are remitted or retained, but they never contemplate any interference with the direct access of the individual soul to God, to receive the pardon which it needs. It may be urged that the absolution in the service for the Visitation of the sick is in such absolute terms, that the declaratory view of the form cannot there be maintained. Dr. Wace, however, has shown in a very interesting contribution to the discussion at Fulham, that language equally uncompromising is found in forms of absolution in use in the Lutheran Church where the idea of sacerdotal authority is entirely repudiated. The conclusion is that absolute as the terms are they are "compatible with the freest and most evangelical proclamation of forgiveness of sins, and in fact rest upon that proclamation." We see then that the Gospel minister looses when he proclaims to the penitent but dejected soul, tied and bound by the chain of its sins, a present free and full forgiveness through the merits of Christ's death, and that he binds when he warns the ungodly that he has neither

part nor lot in the matter, and that upon him who obstinately rejects the offer of Christ's mercy, the wrath of God will most surely abide.

And yet when all this is said something more remains to be said. Certain we are that the Roman doctrines of auricular confession and priestly absolution find no support in the passage before us. But are there no—

4. *Direct powers* to be wielded as the result of these commissioning words? I believe there are, and most blessed and important ones. There are times when human souls long for the helping sound of a human voice, and certainly they are entitled to receive it. Let the thought of priestly absolution be eliminated and we thankfully recognise the principle of individual dealing with souls. What are our after-meetings for but to give opportunity for it? We ask then, has it never happened to the Christian worker, himself in touch with the Divine Spirit and following His guidance, to be given to discern the spiritual condition of an anxious soul, and to apply the very Scripture suited to his case? And what has followed? Have we not sometimes been given to see the seal of Divine approval on the message? Have we not seen the heavenly light which followed on the entrance of the word in season, flash out even in the countenance? and we have known that what we have loosed on earth has been loosed in heaven. But how has this blessed end been

gained? Not by relying on the faulty links of a mechanical apostolical succession, but by the conscious communion of our own souls with God. As to use an interesting illustration I have lately met with, an astronomer following the transit of a star has his telescope so adjusted that by an ingenious arrangement of clockwork it moves in obedience to the movement of the star, yet the clockwork does not move the star, but the correspondence between the telescope and the star rests upon the skill of the mechanic, and the knowledge of the astronomer, so in the correspondence between heaven and earth in binding and loosing souls, it is not because the worker moves heaven, but because heaven moves him, because (that is) he is in delicate sympathy with the working of God's Spirit dwelling within him, and in what he says and does is obeying the guiding and secret monitions of the same Spirit; therefore it is that what he binds or looses on earth is bound or loosed in heaven. It is because the Church has lost sight of the fundamental primary truth, that it is to men filled with the Holy Ghost, and to them only, that these words are intended to apply, that such mistakes have been made and such miserable distortions of their true import have been possible.

Let the Church return to her true spiritual level and these words will cease to present the difficulty which is now so often experienced. In conclusion, let us ask ourselves the practical question: Sincerity,

spirituality, service, are the watch-words of the Church as she should be. How far are they true of us ? What service are we rendering ? Are we sincere, are we in the Spirit, are we at work, are we soul winners ? If not, let us look again at the privileges our Master has here entrusted to His Church, let us claim our share in them, and have faith that while we are in touch with Him He will grant success to our efforts ; that to us also the promise shall be fulfilled in our dealing with souls—  
“ Whose soever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them : and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.” AMEN.

## CHAPTER XVI

### ITS CONDITIONS : CONSECRATION

“Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.”—GAL. i. 16.

THESE words are the keynote of the Apostle's testimony. They describe in one terse sentence his attitude as an apostle of Christ and a teacher of the Gospel. In order to appreciate it we must have clearly before us the circumstances in which he found himself and the difficulties with which he was confronted. His converts were being misled, and his own authority as an apostle was fiercely attacked by certain men from the Church at Jerusalem who represented that St. Paul was a revolutionary ; that his declarations of the freedom of the Gospel, as he preached it, were quite unauthorised ; that he was really subordinate to the Christian leaders—*i.e.* the twelve apostles at Jerusalem, and that they were no parties to his proceedings ; that, although as faithful to Christ as he, they were careful to observe the customs of their fathers, and not to forsake the law of Moses. In other words, these Judaisers were endeavouring to detract from the simplicity and freeness of the Gospel message, and practically to

insist that Christians must become Jews as well. St. Paul's penetrating vision discerned the enormity and magnitude of the danger ; he saw that the freedom of the Gospel itself was at stake. He knew far better than any one could teach him the real character of these objections. Had he not been himself a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and as touching the law a Pharisee ? So, without a moment's hesitation he flung himself into the breach and launched bolt after bolt of invective against those who thus troubled the new-born Church. His determined front, standing though he did absolutely alone, saved the situation, and it is to his uncompromising attitude that it may be fairly said we owe the freedom of the Gospel which we enjoy to-day.

So much for the historical circumstances. They cannot be repeated any more than the authority which Paul claimed as an apostle can be repeated ; nevertheless, the lessons he teaches here are lessons for all time, and have a most important bearing upon Christian life to-day.

As we carefully ponder his utterances, three points emerge to which attention may be directed. The first is this—

## I. THE TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST IS A REVELATION

It was so in Paul's case, and he appeals to it to prove that the Gospel he preached was not



by man, nor after man. It is interesting to find him again and again in his career appealing to this revelation. It is a great matter in the spiritual life to have had a definite experience of heavenly things to which you can appeal ; it enables you to speak with a directness which nothing else can give ; you can say, "Now we believe not because of the word of others, but we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." We repeat, then, that a true knowledge of Christ is a revelation. It is not by a process of reasoning, in which we advance from one point to another, until eventually we arrive at truth (if our premises are well founded). Revelation is something quite distinct from that. Revelation is not investigation, it is the unveiling or disclosing of something hitherto unseen, although it was already there. It is the drawing away of the curtain that hides eternal things from view ; it is the falling of the scales from the spiritual vision. That is why many a simple, humble soul understands the things of the Spirit of God when they are altogether hidden from the wise and prudent. How truly Paul's conversion was a revelation of Christ we need hardly stay to prove. We have only to remember the time at which it was granted to him, when he was no disciple anxious to be instructed in the faith of Jesus Christ, but rather the most determined opponent that Christianity ever

had. It was *a time of prejudice* ; he says here that “ he profited above his equals in the Jewish religion,” he was the most promising pupil of the school of Gamaliel, he was more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of his fathers, he was a staunch upholder of the Jewish religion and practice, and he was not content with repudiating Christianity himself, but he persecuted those from whom he differed. It was *a time of persecution*—bitter persecution. He himself says he persecuted the Christians even to strange cities, or, as St. Luke tells us, “ he made havoc of the Church, and, haling men and women, committed them to prison. It was at such a time as this, while still breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, that the light shined into his heart even as the light shone round about him on the way to Damascus, and transformed the persecutor into a preacher, the accuser into an advocate, and the sinner into a saint. It was certainly not Paul’s investigation of the subject that wrought the mighty change ; it was the supernatural power of the risen Saviour, and nothing less than that power will avail to make a Christian still. How sudden the revelation was, and how sovereign, we know, “ when it pleased God,” says the Apostle, “ who called me by His grace.” It was grace given to the utterly undeserved that found Saul of Tarsus and brought him to the Saviour’s feet.

But, if this be so, our next point is that—

## II. SUCH A REVELATION OF CHRIST CONFERS A CERTAIN INDEPENDENCE ON THOSE WHO RECEIVE IT

as St. John says in one passage, "Ye need not that any man teach you"—that is, there is a point beyond which human teachers cannot go. It is not, of course, intended that a Christian is to be independent of guidance and help from his fellows; we are intended to help one another; but it remains true that that help, after all, cannot proceed beyond a certain point. A stage is reached when the soul must be left with Christ Himself, and when that stage is reached, and when that personal knowledge of Christ has been acquired, it confers independence upon the soul; it can say, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee." Paul was not running here and there to ascertain truth—not at all. He knew where it was to be found. "I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after man, for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. i. 11, 12). Paul got his instructions direct from the Throne; and though, as I have said, his case in one sense is totally apart from others, yet in another sense it is true of every Christian that he must get the knowledge of truth from Christ Himself, or else he will never be sure of it. This independence is the great point the

Apostle is arguing in this passage. He speaks of being separated from his birth, but it was a separation that was only manifested after his conversion. He is at pains to show that he owed nothing to the other Apostles ; he says, for example : " Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were Apostles before me, but I went into Arabia " (ver. 17). That is not mentioned in Acts ix. ; it was a private parenthesis, as it were, in the Apostle's life into which St. Luke did not think it necessary to intrude, but, according to the best authorities, in all probability the time of the visit may be inserted between the 21st and 22nd verses of Acts ix. At any rate, into the solitude of Arabia Paul went to think out the great problems he had just been initiated into ; there he mourned over the past and pondered the future ; he held communion with the Saviour he had found. It is in silent communion with God that we shall learn more than in any other way ; it is in the Divinity School of the Holy Ghost that we may expect to make progress ; there Paul learnt his lessons, and thence he came thoroughly equipped to do battle for his Lord. Now he knew that the Christ whom he had believed to be dead was exalted to the right hand of God. He saw that the Cross, which he had looked upon as a stumbling-block and an accursed thing, was the very instrument of his salvation ; he saw that on it Christ had become a curse for him, and henceforth that Cross from which before he

shrank was now his "everlasting theme." "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. vi. 14).

But, once more—

### III. THIS INDEPENDENCE INVOLVES RESPONSIBILITY

Now that you know the truth, what are you going to do? When Paul knew the truth he had no question about his action. A story is told of a friend who joined the Church of Rome with Cardinals Manning and Newman, that, afterwards reading original authors in the libraries of Europe and becoming convinced that the claims of Rome to a universal supremacy were unfounded, he paid his old friend and former colleague a visit. He laid the facts before him, and when Manning had sufficiently recovered from his surprise he said to him, "And now, my lord, what are you going to do?" "To do!" said Manning. "Have you gone out of your senses? What do you mean?" "I mean," replied the other, "that whatever else I am, I hope I am at least an honest man. I joined the Church of Rome sincerely seeking truth, and now that I find the truth is not in her I am going to leave her. 'What are *you* going to do?' is the question I would ask." Manning waved his hands impatiently. "You must be mad!" he said. "All that you and I have to consider is the voice of the Church to-day and to believe that her voice is the voice of God to us."

So the interview ended. The one man, true to his convictions, when he had the light, walked in the light ; the other, blinded by the false glamour of authority, walked on still in darkness. But the question is, " What are you going to do when new truth bursts upon your vision, when you see things you cannot unsee ? What are you going to do ? " What a moment that was for the Apostle on the way to Damascus, when the truth flashed upon him, and he saw that his whole life had been a mistake, and not only a mistake, but grievous rebellion, fighting against the Saviour, in arms against his Lord. What an awful disillusioning it must have been. But now what was he going to do ? Was he going to brave the consequences of an open avowal of Christ as his Master ? Was he prepared to sacrifice his prospects, to dismay and disappoint his friends in Jerusalem who had sent him to Damascus ? Was he going to run the risk of being torn to pieces by a mob of his own countrymen who had already stoned Stephen, and would repeat the process for him ? What was he going to do ? Ah, that was the question, and that is the question which comes again and again to the soul that sees the light. Am I going to be faithful to what I have seen, or am I going to shrink back from it ? To all such waverers the noble reply of the Apostle for ever speaks : " Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood." He did not confer with his own flesh and blood, for it was weak ;



he did not confer with the flesh and blood of his friends, who might have counselled him to a caution which meant temporising and tampering with truth. His mind was made up; the die was cast; his decision was taken; his course lay straight on; at all costs he was going to preach the Gospel he had found. "Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel" (1 Cor. ix. 16).

The effect of that vision of Christ on Paul was not only to convert him, but to conquer him. He was henceforth Christ's bond slave. "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" was his only cry. His rebellion was gone never to return, and Christ claimed and took possession of that noble spirit for His own. "It pleased God," writes the Apostle, "to reveal His Son (not only *to* me, but) *in* me." He found Christ not only as a distant Saviour in the sky, but as a present Saviour in his heart; he found Him as an indwelling Saviour, able to save to the uttermost.

This is the Apostle's account of his conversion, of his sanctification, of his service. "I conferred not with flesh and blood." What account can we give? Where amongst us is there the same uncompromising decision? Where the same forgetfulness of self, the same readiness to count all things but loss for Christ? He has set us the example, and to every reluctant heart that example speaks: "Go and do thou likewise."



## CHAPTER XVII

### ITS CONDITIONS : CONFIDENCE

"For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."—2 TIM. i. 12.

"TRIALS," said a friend of mine to me on one occasion, "are not to be *gone* through, they are to be *sung* through." I confess his standard seemed to me, like the glittering summits of Mont Blanc, too high a level for the ordinary pilgrim to aspire to; for where shall we find the man who is ready not only to endure tribulation but to rejoice in it? And yet, after all, is not this the Christian calling? Is it not true that the Lord has promised us "a safe landing but not a calm passage"? Did not the apostle "glory in tribulation also"?

The Gospel of Christ is a Gospel for sufferers? If it were not, half the world could have no interest in it; for we may surely say that the world is made up (except for the worthless fringe of idlers) of toilers and sufferers? Yes, the Gospel of Christ is an Evangel for the suffering. And so the Great Apostle found it; for, next to the suffering Saviour Himself, we may well think of him as a Prince and Pattern

among sufferers. "For which cause," he writes, "I suffer these things." What things? Poverty, shame, distress, imprisonment, scourging, stoning, shipwreck, and finally a violent death. What a catalogue! His own words (in 2 Cor. xi. 24-28) best enumerate the black list of woes. Well may he add, "Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is offended and I burn not?" The sufferings and trials of ordinary Christian experience sink into insignificance when compared with such a record as his. Yet it is just this dark background that throws into such bright relief the faith and hope that shine resplendent in the apostle's words, "I am not ashamed," saith he, "I know."

Nothing is more remarkable or inspiring in the apostle's career than that as it draws to its close it mounts higher and higher into the light and joy of the heaven to which he is hastening. Already the sunshine from the arch above him has irradiated the steep and lonely mountain track that he is traversing. Already the purer air invigorates him, the glories of the upper world burst upon his view. Voices from the unseen are calling to him; he can almost see the beckoning hands stretched out to welcome him. He belongs not to earth but heaven; he knows it, he feels it, he has the witness in his soul. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the

Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day : and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing ” (2 Tim. iv. 8). Oh, to end well ! To end well, is not this an ambition worthy of every noble mind ? It was St. Paul’s ambition. He avowed it. To “accomplish ” his course (Acts xx. 24, R.V.) this was his aim, for this he counted not even his life dear unto himself. “The lust of finishing ” is upon me, wrote the great Livingstone to the friends who urged him to return. He could not come home until he had fulfilled his task.

On the other hand, could there be a more scathing verdict on a life’s career than this : “I have found no works of thine fulfilled before my God ” (Rev. iii. 2, R.V.) ? But how shall we finish well ? How through storm and sunshine shall we hold on our way ! When suffering in its myriad forms assails us, how shall we still prevail ? For as we have already said, we must lay our account with suffering. “The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” “And not only so, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body ” (Rom. viii. 23). “Weak health,” surely the apostle had it in his mind when he thus longed not to be “unclothed but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.” Perhaps among all causes of suffering none takes a

more prominent place than this, were it only because all other forms of trial are aggravated thereby ; and from such infirmities the apostle, though he does not here refer to them, was never free. His thorn in the flesh, due in all probability to the stoning at Iconium, when, as some think, he was caught up into the third heaven (Acts xiv. 17, 20 with 2 Cor. xii. 2-4), whatever its precise nature, so shattered his nervous system, that henceforth his eyesight failed (Gal. iv. 14, 15), his hands trembled so that he wrote (except on the rarest occasions) by an amanuensis (Gal. vi. 11), and his speech was affected (2 Cor. x. 10). For the removal of this affliction he pleaded thrice, but he pleaded in vain (2 Cor. xii. 8-9). Broken he was and broken until his departure hence, he must remain. We would be independent, but God will " never do that for us to-day which would make us independent of Him to-morrow." Weak health, however, is not the only form of suffering. In the verse before us it is suffering for Christ's sake that St. Paul is thinking of. Such suffering must be reckoned with. No man can hope to follow a crucified Master and himself escape the cross. " It is enough for the servant that he be as his master and the disciple as his Lord." It may be in circumstances, it may be in reputation, it may be by open opposition and persecution, but in some way or other the suffering will come. How shall it be met ? How shall it be cheerfully borne ?

This is the question answered, and answered triumphantly in the words before us. Let us look at them again. They were written in all probability from the Mamertine dungeon at Rome—a terrible prison-house consisting of “two chambers, an upper and a lower, constructed of huge blocks of tufa without cement, fastened together with iron rivets. One side of the lower chamber is excavated from the solid rock.” There is a hole in the centre of the floor of the upper chamber through which condemned prisoners were let down. Sallust, the Roman historian, thus describes it: “In the prison called Tullianum, there is a place about ten feet deep, when you have descended a little to the left: it is surrounded on the sides by walls and is closed above by a vaulted roof of stone. The appearance of it from the filth, the darkness, and the smell is terrible.”<sup>1</sup> In such circumstances as these what testimony can you expect? Is there a power that can enable a man not merely to rise above such miseries, but to inspire others with faith and courage like his own? We will ponder the apostle’s words for our reply. Observe his positivism. “*I know*,” says he, not *I hope*, not *I think*—“*I know*.” Nowadays it is considered the highest proof of wisdom to affirm that we cannot “know” anything. If you ask the philosophers of to-day to solve the great problems relating to man’s present happiness

<sup>1</sup> Macduff, “St. Paul in Rome.” *Intro.* p. 74.

and future destiny, they will tell you that certainty in these matters cannot be attained, that it is not given to man to *know* the things which belong to his peace. He must be content to grope on in the dark.

“A child crying in the night.  
And with no language but a cry.”

They are agnostics, they tell you; they do not *know* anything. Well, for my part I prefer the company of St. Paul to that of the philosophers. Paul knows what none of the wise men of this world know. He knows his Saviour. Here we have an account of this knowledge and the use he made of it. We shall find it stood him in good stead when all other resources failed. We will notice—

#### I. THE DEPOSIT WHICH PAUL MADE

He speaks of having “committed” something—a remarkable expression, which indicates that the transaction is of great importance. Thus we read of Abraham that all the goods of his house were committed to the care of Eliezer, and of Potiphar that he “left all that he had in Joseph’s hand.” Or we hear of some anxious father, who in dying circumstances calling to his bedside a trusted friend, confides to his care his dear and only child. He says, “I commit this child to you, I hand him over to your keeping, I constitute you his guardian, I leave him in your hands.” It is a solemn trust, a solemn deposit which is thus made. Or we



might illustrate Paul's meaning by the case of a person who is leaving the country and wishes to put valuables in a place of safety. A lady, for example, who before going abroad deposits her plate or her jewels at her banker's. It is the same thought, the thought of committal. I have often been taught the same lesson by the notices found in the rooms of an hotel: "The management will not be responsible for the safety of valuables of travellers unless they are deposited in the bureau." There must be a committal. Now what was it that Paul had committed? First, without a doubt, he committed *his soul*. Why had he done so? First, it has been well said, *because he was so convinced of its value*.

Have any of us realised the value of the soul? I am perfectly sure we have not. I do not believe any one of us has an adequate conception of its worth. Think of *its capacities for happiness!* The soul has been made capable of enjoying God. The soul has a capacity for infinite enjoyment. That restlessness which so possesses you, that craving for something new, that discontent, those longings so deep, so infinite, which rise out of the depths of your being and demonstrate ever and again the absolute impossibility of any created thing satisfying you, what are they but an unanswerable proof that you were made for God, that you are capable of infinite joys? And since the soul is capable



of such wonderful joys, it is not less capable of suffering too.<sup>1</sup> "Hell is a nature as well as a place." What! shall the soul of a man constituted as ours is, with all its longings, yearnings, and capacities, and thirst for satisfaction, be left absolutely alone, be left to prey upon itself, be left without the means of assuaging the thirst that burns within it, be left without God, and say, shall a man be thus forsaken and not taste the meaning of hell? Here men, it is true, are only too ready to turn from God and forget Him, but it is because they have a thousand things to divert them and distract their attention, and yet even here there are times in the worldling's history when his life is a burden to him and he feels its emptiness and its unanswered needs. But what will it be to wake up in eternity and find that we are God-forsaken, to find ourselves there in the blackness and darkness for ever. Apart altogether from the awful truth of the penal sufferings of the lost, of "the vengeance of eternal fire," is there not hell enough in the very thought of the uncontrolled passions of the soul, for ever burning and for ever unconsumed?

Think on these things and measure, if you can, the value of the soul. Finally, and above all else, the value of the soul is shown by *the cost of its redemption*. We generally judge of the value of a thing by its cost. Have you ever been overwhelmed

<sup>1</sup> Saurin, Works, vol. iii. p. 91.

by the thought of Calvary, that it cost nothing less than the life-blood of the Son of God to redeem the soul ? It has been so familiar to us from our childhood that, like a trite, oft-told tale, its unspeakable greatness does not awe us as it should. The Incarnation is the miracle of miracles, but we know it so well that we do not realise its greatness. We are like the villagers who live under the shadow of Mont Blanc ; they are so familiar with the sight that they seldom trouble themselves to look at it, whilst other people come from the ends of the earth to gaze upon it. "Familiarity breeds contempt."

It is even so with the Incarnation of our Lord ; we do not realise its immeasurable condescension. He "made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men : and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, *even the death of the cross*" (Phil. ii. 7, 8). It was that which awakened Paul's admiration. No Roman citizen could suffer crucifixion. That was reserved for slaves. A Roman citizen might die by the headsman's axe, but he could not be subjected to the ignominy of the cross. Christ "became obedient unto death, *even the death of the cross.*" It was impossible for Him to go lower, and thus low He went that He might rescue you and me.

How God must value the soul ; and yet there

are men who will sell their soul to the devil for the merest trifle, for some pleasure of sin. You reply, "I do feel the value of my soul." Well, let me ask you one question: What have you done with it? Is it in safe hands? If not, do not tell me you feel its value. You do not know yet what its value is. Is it in safe keeping? If you were in charge of the Crown jewels of this country would you leave them out in the open street to the chances of robbery from every passer-by? If you have not committed your soul to Christ's keeping you do not yet know its value. Paul committed his soul to Christ because he was convinced of its value. But there was another reason. It was *because he knew he could not keep his soul himself*. He could not save it himself. Somebody has said that a child entrusted with the conveyance of the great Kohinoor diamond from the Marble Arch to the Tower would have a thousand times better chance of reaching its destination safely than the wisest and best man that ever lived would have of keeping his own soul.

You cannot save yourself, you cannot sanctify yourself, and therefore if your soul is to be safe it must be placed in the hands of another. But Paul committed not only his soul, though it was the most precious thing he had, but *himself*, body, soul, and spirit; he committed his cares, his hopes, his prospects, all he desired, wished and hoped for, he

made a complete and entire surrender of everything he had to Jesus Christ. His reputation—how certainly he committed that to Christ! I suppose there was never a man who ventured more in that respect than the Apostle Paul. I have often thought that Gamaliel, his great tutor, must have heaved many a sigh when the news was brought to him of Saul's conversion. "What! Saul of Tarsus, my most promising pupil, joined the Nazarenes?—Saul, who more than any other disciple in my school, I had expected would have done credit to my teaching; Saul, who I had hoped would one day have succeeded me in the chair of the Rabbi? Is it possible that *Saul*, cultured, acute, profound as a thinker, practical as a worker, zealous as a worshipper, has thrown himself into the hands of this despised, obscure and fanatical sect, the followers of the Crucified? Is it conceivable that he should have thrown himself away after such a fashion?" Yes, it was conceivable. It was the fact. Saul had done it; he had ventured everything, hazarded his reputation, his prospects, his life, his all for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"All he had and all he hoped for,  
All he was and all he hoped to be,"

he ventured upon Christ. He did not do things by halves. If any read these lines who have lately decided for Christ, let me urge you not to do it by

halves. Hold nothing back, make a complete committal of yourself to Christ if you want to be a happy and successful Christian in the days that lie before you. All your misery will arise from half-heartedness in your new life. If you are half-hearted, if you are holding something back, if you are disobedient to the heavenly vision that has come to you, then your newly-found joy will soon leave you. Be thorough with Christ and Christ will be thorough with you. Paul was thorough, he gave his all ! Now what was—

## II. THE PERSUASION WHICH HE HAD ABOUT IT ?

What was the confidence he expressed about this deposit which he had made ? We have seen he had not a very easy time of it, and for that matter it would be a very great mistake to tell young Christians who have just begun the new life that they will have an easy time of it. On the contrary, you are committed to an unceasing warfare, a deadly strife : do not expect anything else. If you are going to be a Christian indeed all hell is against you, and until you have learnt the true secret of warfare you will find that your own heart is not only against you but too strong for you. There will frequently be a tremendous inward conflict. Every young Christian knows that. If he is truly born again there is a new man born into him. What is the consequence of that ? Why, that the old life

will assert itself as it never did before when it had it all its own way ; it will do its utmost to strangle and destroy the new life. It takes some little time to learn the secret of what it is to be dead with Christ and risen with Him. It is not by vain, fruitless struggles that you can win that victory, but through faith in Christ. You are not only justified through faith but sanctified through faith also, and you have to learn that Christ's death means not only death *for* your sin but *to* your sin. All the hateful things in your heart are nailed to Christ's cross. Christ's death and burial mean the death and burial of your sinfulness. You must claim and stick to it by faith, in spite of everything that seems to speak to the contrary, that you are dead with Christ and risen with Him. The Christian life is a battle, do not think it is anything else ; it is not playing at soldiers ; it is a tremendous war, but there is victory all along the line if you will take Christ's way of fighting. Do not be discouraged because you find there is war, but ask God to show you the way to victory and how to become more than conquerors through faith in Him that loves you. Paul knew this secret of victory within, though he had some very rough times—as you may see if you read the seventh of Romans ; he also had rough times without. “For the which cause I also *suffer* these things,” he says (2 Tim. i. 12). He suffered for his faith and for his faith-



fulness. "Nevertheless," he adds, "I am not ashamed." He did not regret all the troubles he had gone through, and you will never regret being a Christian. The devil will come to you with his doubts, and there will be times in your life when you will be ready to throw down your weapons and run away; but you cannot do it, you are pledged to fight to the end, and in the hardest day you will never regret being a Christian. Paul said, "I am not ashamed," I know I shall have to suffer but it is going to end well. What was his persuasion? "I am persuaded," he says, that "He is *able to keep* that which I have committed unto Him." What did he mean? First, he meant that Christ was *able to keep him from finally falling away*, that although he would certainly be sorely tried, yet that Christ having begun the good work would continue it, that He was the Good Shepherd and was responsible for the sheep, and was not going to have a sheep missing. Paul was persuaded that Christ was able to keep him from finally perishing, He would look after Him. And Christ will look after you and me. If we have really come to Christ; Christ will look after us. But it meant not only that Christ was able to keep him from finally falling away, but that He was *able to keep him from being overwhelmed in the days of sorrow, temptation, discouragement, affliction, and darkness*. Christ was able to keep him when



everything seemed against him, when all hell seemed to be let loose against him. He might go down very low, but he would never be allowed to sink. "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isa. xliii. 2). God does not say there will be no fires to go through, but He does say that in going through them you shall not be burned. That is how it was he could be triumphant in the Mamertine dungeon. But Paul also meant that God was *able to keep* the soul which he had thus committed to Him *from falling into sin*. "Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin." Paul was convinced that if he had the faith for it Christ was able to keep him from stumbling, to keep him from dishonouring his Lord. This is a far greater demand on his faith than any other. He believed Christ was "able to *guard* him from *stumbling*" (Jude 24). Paul was convinced that Christ could keep him, and his triumphant testimony challenges our faith to-day. Lastly, what was—

### III. THE GROUND UPON WHICH THIS PERSUASION RESTED ?

It was *personal knowledge of Him whom he trusted*. "I know *whom* I have believed," not "what."

Not the doctrines of the Gospel, though no man knew them better. The writer of the Epistle to the Romans was no novice in Christian doctrine, but he says nothing about doctrines. "I know *whom*." Some one has said it is a good thing to know the medicines, but it is a better thing to know the physician. Yes, you can make a mistake about medicines and take the wrong one. Let the Physician Himself have charge of you. "I know *whom*." Not a doctrine but a Person. I often hear the Apostle's words misquoted. During the last illness of the late Dr. Alexander, of Princeton, he was visited by a former student. After a few words of conversation had been exchanged, the venerable doctor said to the young disciple, "Give me some text to help me, quote me some text that will strengthen me for the last battle." And the young man repeated the words, "I know 'in' whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." "No," said the doctor, "that is not right; it is not '*in whom*,' it is '*whom*.' I will not have even a *preposition* between me and my Saviour." "I know *whom*." Do you know Him? The better you know Him the more you will trust Him. Paul's persuasion that he would be kept depended upon his personal knowledge of Christ. Paul knew Christ pretty well. I suppose there never was a saint who knew Christ better than the

Great Apostle, yet this was his one desire—to know Christ better and to make Him better known. To young converts I would say, recollect your faith in Christ will be just in proportion to your knowledge of Him. I remember a story of Mr. Moody which illustrates my statement. When he was in the country on one occasion he saw a man with a group of boys round him. Presently the boys climbed on to the top of a high wall. Then the man standing at a little distance from them, said “Jump,” and as they jumped he caught them. But there was one little fellow who could not be induced to leap. Mr. Moody said to the stranger, “My friend, what are you doing with those boys?” “I am teaching them what faith is,” was the answer; “I am teaching them to trust me.” “But,” said Mr. Moody, “that little fellow there would not jump.” “No,” said the man, “he does not *know* me, he is not my boy.” Ah, you cannot trust Christ unless you know Him. If you know Him you will trust Him, and the better you know Him the more you will trust Him. He is the only trustworthy Person to be found this side eternity. You cannot trust any one else, you cannot trust yourself, but you can trust Christ. I would like to ask the saints who read these lines whether they have ever found Christ deceive them? I know what their answer will be. They will say He alone deserves the name of Friend. They will

say that they could fill a volume with His praise. If these lines are read by a young Christian, I commend to him the study of the character of the Saviour he has found. I recommend him to make a closer acquaintance with Christ. Many people are anxious to make the acquaintance of those whom they think will benefit them. I wonder how many show anything like the appreciation they ought to show of the great Friend they have in Jesus Christ. I would almost say what a great saint once said, "Begin to live as though Christ and you were alone in the world." Make Him your most intimate Friend, study His Word on your knees. Make a personal Friend of Christ, and you will find Christ still deals tenderly and familiarly with men, that He still comes near and speaks to His children as He does not to the world. Though you may have to suffer, you will not be ashamed, for you will be able to say with His veteran servant of old, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." May it be so with us all, for His name's sake! Amen.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### ITS CONDITIONS : CO-OPERATION

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.”—PHIL. ii. 12, 13.

THIS is a notable instance of a misunderstood text. Put it side by side with the same Apostle’s wonderful statement in Romans iv. 5: “To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness,” and it almost seems to be a contradiction in terms, and to teach in the most unmistakable way salvation by works. The truth, however, is that the seeming contradictions are in complete harmony, as we shall see when we examine the passage more closely.

Notice first—

#### I. THE WORK WE HAVE TO DO.

“Work out,” says the Apostle, “your own salvation.” The difficulty here is only superficial; it arises from a want of appreciation of the meaning of the terms employed. If we were to give the

command its full force we should be content to use two words: first, confession; and second, completeness. First, *confession*. I like to lay a little emphasis upon our translation here, "work out." I am not prepared to say that the primary idea in the original language is that of making work conspicuous, but yet the thought is fairly deducible from it, and there is no more important injunction to any Christian than that which bids him let his light shine before men. It is our duty, not only to be Christians, but to let it be known that we are such. We are to work *out* our salvation. Lay stress upon the little word *out*. It is well enough to have our religion beneath the surface, but God wants it known and read of all men. Confess your Master by your life and by your lips; be not ashamed to let it be known that He is yours and you are His. The further thought undoubtedly, however, in the passage is *completeness*. Salvation is a mighty word. Observe the Apostle does not say, "Work *for* your salvation;" he says, "work *out* your salvation." The two things are quite distinct. To use a simple illustration that has often been employed, I cannot go and work in my neighbour's garden without his permission, but I am perfectly free to work in my own. Salvation is ours, not as a result of our efforts, but as the free gift of God. It is by no means inconsistent with the development of our own character, our own

lives, of all that salvation includes. It is as if God said to us, "You have an estate now, develop its resources; you have your garden now, cultivate it; you have salvation now, work it out, carry it out to its furthest issues—let all men see what a great and beautiful gift is yours." How lamentable to see an estate squandered at the gaming-table or the racecourse—to see one entering upon an inheritance who is utterly unworthy of his position, or incapable of improving the opportunities given to him. So in Christian life how sad to see opportunities lost and energies dissipated which might have brought a rich return of glory to the Master. It is to avoid such disasters that the Apostle urges upon us to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. What a work needs to be done in our own hearts! Are we ready yet to join the heavenly choir? We may have a title to heaven, but have we a character; are we made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light? Are our tempers, our dispositions, attuned to the harmony of heaven? Are we heavenly minded? Can we rise above earth's trifles and earth's allurements, and find our true happiness where Christ sits at the right hand of God? Is there no need of progress, no need of greater conformity to the image of our Lord? "Work out," says the Apostle, "your own salvation," and surely there is need for that injunction.



Now, if this is the work we have to do, what is—

## II. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH IT SHOULD BE DONE ?

The first feature I will mention is *sincerity*. We are not to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds ; to be one thing in one company and another in another. Is there no danger of our taking our colour from the society in which we find ourselves ? Do you never find yourself tempted to be worldly with the worldly, and holy with the holy. What does the Apostle say ? “ Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence.” It is as if he would say, Do not live in *reflected light* ; do not be earnest while I am with you, and then let me hear of lukewarmness when my back is turned. Many Christians are far too dependent upon the circumstances in which they are found ! No doubt company affects us all, and that is why it is so important that our confession should be open. Yes, the first mark is sincerity ; we must be the same at all times, in all places ; not one thing in one place and another in another, but in singleness of heart live only for Christ. One of the saddest illustrations of the undue effect of an over-shadowing influence which had not really touched the heart is found in the history of Joash, who, while Jehoiada lived, followed the worship of Jehovah, but as soon as he was dead, yielded to the representations of the

younger men of his court, and ended his days an idolater. Whatever we are let us not serve God for by-ends, but be faithful in all we undertake for Him.

Next, this work must be done *submissively*. There is one great hindrance to our obedience which has constantly to be dealt with, and that is carnality of mind, the assertion of self-will ; it is this that is always cropping up till God breaks it, and it is this that hinders our yielding our souls to the Divine Pattern. This self-will must die ; we must say with John the Baptist, "He must increase, but I must decrease" ; we must consign it to the death, which God has prepared for it in the death of His Son.

Further, this work must be done, shall we say, *sensitively*. How remarkable are the expressions used, "with fear and trembling." What is understood by it ? Not the slavish fear which brings the spirit into bondage, but rather that modest, humble, sensitive spirit which yields to God as the quivering grass of the meadow yields to every breeze that sweeps over its waving wealth of stems ; so the soul, in deep contrition before God, trembles lest it should be found doing its own will instead of the will of Him who has come to dwell in it. It is a holy fear lest we should mistake our will for His.

"That I no more from Thee may part,  
No more Thy goodness grieve ;  
The filial awe, the fleshy heart,  
The tender conscience give."

As a boat in the rapids of a mighty river, like the St. Lawrence, for example, answers to every movement of the helmsman's hand, so should our frail bark respond to the slightest touch of God's controlling Spirit; thus we should be saved from many a danger and from many a sad mistake.

And, once more, this work must be done *strenuously*. Though there is to be this utter surrender of ourselves to God, let us not mistake it for mere passivity. *Work*, says the Apostle. Here co-operation is required; you, too, are responsible; you are not a mere cog in the wheel—it is to your intelligent and deliberate purpose that the success you are aiming at will be due. You must combine with God, and be willing to work out as He works in.

And now, what are—

### III. THE ENCOURAGEMENTS

to do the work which we are called? First of all, there is *the Divine Pattern*. This is what the Apostle has been putting before us: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." How wonderfully did Christ submit; He came, not to do His own will, but the will of Him that sent Him. He lived a life of perfect submission and complete dependence, and in this He has left us an example that we should follow in His steps.

Further, there is *the Divine power*. "It is God," says the Apostle, "that worketh in you both to will

and to do of His good pleasure." How remarkable is this statement, for what are the two component parts of an action? Are they not the disposition and the doing? First, the disposition to will, and this is the greatest difficulty, for the natural man is not inclined at all to do even what he knows to be right. "I see a better course," says Virgil of old, "and I approve, but I follow the worse." His judgment approves, but his will and his inclination lead him in the opposite direction. See how the Gospel transcends the law; the law can tell you what to do, but Christ alone can enable you to do what you know to be right. Here is a remedy which goes to the foundation of the disease, which touches, not the action only, but the very springs of action. Here is a power which will work in you to will at a moment when you are most unwilling, for just then God is able to make you willing. Surely when we think of it, we are ready to say with St. Augustine, "Lord, give what Thou commandest, and then command what Thou wilt." This Gospel is indeed good news for man's unwilling heart, and especially sweet is it to be drawn into harmony with Christ so that we may love the thing which He commands instead of shrinking from it. It is God that worketh in you to will, and that will gives power, for, not only does He work in us to will, but also to do. Here is *action*. We are to be, said the Apostle, not hearers only, but doers of the Word,

and in this passage the secret is revealed as to how the doing can be accomplished. In short, we have here, not a mere pattern without, but a power within ; not only a picture of what we ought to be, but a power to enable us to become what we feel God asks of us.

Finally, there is *the Divine pleasure*. "He worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure." We were created for His pleasure ; we were created to reflect His glory, and to give Him praise ; we are redeemed for His pleasure. It is only as we enter into this higher object of our existence, the glory of God, that we shall find truest happiness and the real satisfaction of which we stand so much in need. How is this work progressing with us ? Are we working out our salvation, or are we hindered in it ? "Ye did run well who did hinder you," wrote the Apostle. Yes, there are many hindrances ; there is the fear of man which bringeth a snare ; there is the love of the world which fascinates and allures us ; there is the sluggishness of spirit which, if we are not on our guard, may paralyse our energies. Let us lay to heart the Apostle's injunction, and "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Amen.

## CHAPTER XIX

### ITS CONDITIONS : COMMUNION

#### (I) PRAYER

“And He said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you”—LUKE xi. 5-9.

THE parable of the Friend at Midnight is one of the most striking pictures in the Gospel gallery. Its incidents are less familiar to us than to dwellers in the East, where to this day, in order to avoid the tropical heat, it is a common practice to travel by night. In the story we have the unexpected arrival of one of these midnight travellers. He enters a village in the dead of night, knocks up his friend, and asks for refreshment. His friend, though willing to help, has nothing in the house, and hastens in his turn to a neighbour, knocking again and again, and pleading for the supply of his need. At first his efforts meet only with rebuffs;

the unseasonableness of the hour, the inconvenience of a response are pleaded as excuses for disregarding his request; but the suitor will not take a denial. The knocking continues, and, finding sleep impossible, at length the reluctant householder, in mere self-defence, rises and fulfils his friend's request. Now, says our Lord, there is a picture of importunity—an importunity which you must exercise when you prefer your requests to God. The story suggests certain important reflections. We ask—

First. *Why does God delay to answer prayer?*

Secondly. *What are the encouragements which this parable offers for perseverance in prayer, in spite of such delays?*

### I. WHY DOES GOD DELAY TO ANSWER PRAYER?

Taking the parable as our guide, we answer that oftentimes God does not delay because the request in itself is wrong. This man was not wrong *in the occasion of his petition*. What was it that brought him as a suppliant to the door? Was it not a sense of want, a consciousness of need, a conviction of his own emptiness and lack of resource? Was it not, in short, that very condition of soul which God has assured us He will meet with blessing? “He filleth the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away.”

Then, further, this man was not wrong *as to the*



*matter of his petition.* What did he ask for? Not for luxuries; he asked for bread. Surely it was a reasonable request. And we, when we come pleading with our heavenly Father to give us the True Bread from heaven, may be sure that the matter of our request is not displeasing to Him. It is for this very Bread that He would see us hungry. Indeed, it is His work to awaken hunger and thirst after Him who is the true Bread and the Living Water. To plead for the Holy Spirit is to plead for the very thing which He has urged us to ask for.

Nor was the man in the parable wrong *as to the purpose for which he desired the gift.* It sometimes happens that though good things are asked for, it is for unworthy ends. It is possible even to ask for the power of the Spirit to gratify selfish purposes, or to receive the praise of men. But this man asked for bread—not that he might misuse it, not that he might waste it, but that with it he might supply the necessities of others. He asked for it for himself only that he might give it away. And this is the very spirit which our Lord would see us manifest when we come to Him in prayer for His richest gifts, for “in blessing us He thinks of others still unblessed.”

And yet this reasonable request was for a time refused; the answer, at any rate, was postponed. How are we to account for the delay?

Now let us notice, as a general principle when confronted with delays in answer to our prayer that it often happens *delays are not denials; they are "part of the answer."* This is what our Lord designs to teach us here, and in order to do it He resorts to teaching by contrast. He paints a picture of a man whose character was the very reverse of the character of Him, the loving heavenly Father, with whom we have to do. The Lord delays His answers to our prayers—

*To see if we are in earnest in preferring our request.* "If the arrow of prayer," says an old writer, "is to enter Heaven, we must draw it from a soul full bent." What insults have we frequently offered to God by our hurried and careless petitions? The words have been uttered, but the thoughts have been elsewhere. There has been no sense of the majesty of the Divine presence, there has been no intensity.

In that most interesting and thrilling account of Dr. Paton's missionary work in the New Hebrides, we have a remarkable instance of answered prayer in the discovery of water. The Lord, Dr. Paton was convinced, directed Him to the place where water could be found, to the amazement of the natives. But yet there must be the patient digging of the well. The water was there, but it must be dug for; it was beneath their feet, but it only yielded itself to hard work. And so the Water of

Life is accessible, placed within our reach, but if it is to be ours there must be intensity in the asking. There must be the evidence that we are in earnest.

The blessings which we so often glibly enumerate with our lips are mighty. They have cost the life-blood of the Son of God to procure. They are great things, and, though freely given, they are not to be parted with to those who hold them cheap. It is to deepen our appreciation of their value that God sometimes sees fit to delay their bestowal.

Again, delays in answer to prayer are sometimes experienced *because our God will have us longer at His feet*. We have been too ready to claim His gifts, and to forget Himself the Giver, to spend no more time in His presence than avails for the answer to our petitions. But God would teach us that He is His own best gift, and that to dwell with Him, to abide in His presence, is in itself the richest blessing that He can bestow or we receive.

Delay in answer to prayer *prepares us for receiving the blessing when it comes*. The importunity which God would call forth in us is itself helpful to prepare the soul for blessing. There are certain conditions of the intellect, when it is thoroughly awakened and exercised, in which achievements are possible that at other times would be altogether out of reach, and there are certain conditions of soul in which God can do more for us in an hour or in a day than perhaps He has been able to do before

in years. God could not give, although we asked Him, because we were not ready to receive. The delay is only a token that the blessing is too rich and great for us in our present spiritual condition. Those prayers that are longest in being answered are often most richly answered at last, just as those ships which are latest in coming into port often have the richest cargo.

We have seen some of the reasons for delay. Notice, now, some of—

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## II. THE ENCOURAGEMENTS TO PERSEVERE IN PRAYER

As we have said already, the force of the parable lies not in parallel, but in contrast. What, then, are the contrasts in which encouragement is to be found? The first is in *the condition of the Donor*. In the parable the householder is found asleep. But our God never slumbers nor sleeps. We have never to fear disturbing Him as this man was disturbed, nor to awaken Him, as Elijah tauntingly said to the priests of Baal: "Peradventure he sleeps, and must be awakened." "He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."

The second is in *the time of the application*. The visitor came in the dead of night, but our petitions are offered in midday. This is the time to pray. "Behold, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." Nay, it is the Pentecostal day—

the time to favour Zion. The day of grace is shining yet. The throne of grace is still open. The throne of judgment is not yet set up.

The third is, that *God's nature is the very opposite to that of the man referred to in the parable.* This man was selfish, but the nature of God is to give. This man would not rise and give simply because he was the friend of him who asked. When at length he rose, it was to save himself further annoyance. But God delights to bestow. He gives not to get rid of the applicant, but to manifest towards him His unfailing compassion and pity. This man thought only of his own comfort throughout, but God thinks of the well-being of those who seek His favour. "He that spared not His own Son, but freely delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things ?" Or, again, as the verse which follows the parable itself declares : "What man is there among you, who, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone, or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent ?" "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him."

Let the parable, therefore, encourage us steadfastly to follow the pathway of prayer, the path trodden by our Saviour Himself, the path trodden by the saints that have gone before us. Let us

plead with God to make us above all things mighty in prayer, nor let us rest “until the Spirit be poured out from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest” (Isa. xxxii. 15). Amen.

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## CHAPTER XX

### ITS CONDITIONS : COMMUNION

#### (II) THE SCRIPTURES

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (St. Paul).—2 TIM. iii. 16.

CAN we believe the Bible? Such a question may sound childish, or something worse. But it has become necessary to discuss it.

“You have no idea,” said a young man in a City office to me only a few months ago, “what I have to go through. I am known to be a Christian, and I am the butt of the office, *because I believe the Bible*. ‘What!’ they say, ‘believe that old book! Why, it has been exploded long ago. No one believes the Bible nowadays. Who believes in Jonah and the whale, and all the rest of it? You must be a little weak, gone in the upper storey,’ &c., &c.”

That young man was fighting a hard battle, and there are hundreds of others like him. They need sympathy and they need support, and too often they fail to receive it. I am not surprised when I am told—as I was some years ago—by a free-thinking



barrister from Paris, that "the Bible is a mere question of the book-binder."

But I must confess I *am* taken aback when I read, as I did the other day, in the address of an influential theological teacher, that "it must be our aim, carefully, of course, but gradually, to withdraw confidence from the Bible (*i.e.* the Old Testament Scriptures), and fix it on the life of our Lord in the Gospels"! Such a statement betrays an ignorance of the essential unity and solidarity of Scripture which is almost incredible. As if it were possible to discard the Old Testament and yet retain our faith in the New; to accept the historical Christ, and yet deny the truth of the prophecies which foretell His Advent. *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* What may we expect when the Scriptures are no longer the judge of the critic (John xii. 48), but the critic the judge of the Scriptures? Yet this attitude, which was once the exception, is fast becoming the rule, even among professedly Christian teachers. "We have not followed cunningly-devised fables," writes St. Peter (2 Peter i. 16), when he bears testimony not only to the glory of Christ, but to the living personality of Moses and Elijah, whom he saw with his own eyes on the Holy Mount. But (to say nothing of Elijah) the critics—until lately, at any rate—have had grave doubts as to the existence of Moses. "When Dr. J. P. Thompson visited Berlin in his early manhood he

met the famous Lepsius in the Library of the Royal University, and when the young man told the scholar that he hoped, at some future time, to write a little book on Moses, the German professor exploded. ‘But, mein Gott, *there never was a Moses.*’ That was the fashion fifty years ago. But since the discovery of the Tel-el-Amarna tablets, which prove that the art of writing was practised a hundred years before Abraham, Moses has come back to stay.”<sup>1</sup>

Again, St. Peter, in his well-known words (2 Peter i. 21), affirms the inspiration of the *writers* of the Bible; while St. Paul, in the famous passage at the head of this paper, affirms the inspiration of the *writing* itself—the one statement supplementing the other. But then!—to quote in substance an answer actually given at a recent theological examination in one of our universities—“Of course we cannot expect the results of Biblical criticism from St. Paul which we get from the higher critics in our day, but *he did his best* with the limited means at his disposal.” (*Sic*). Such an answer may, for its ignorance and insolence, be phenomenal, but it could never have been given if the leaven of unbelief had not been working far and near in the minds both of teachers and taught.

The question is, How is this widespread error to be met? We believe as all other errors are to be

<sup>1</sup> Behrends’ “Old Testament under Fire,” p. 64.

met, viz. by an appeal to the pages of Inspiration itself. But, it will be asked,

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY "INSPIRATION" ?

How do you define it ? There are objectors who boldly claim the prerogative of inspiration for any writer of genius, and declare that Shakespeare and Milton stand in the same category with St. John and St. Paul. Others affirm that inspiration is not the monopoly of the writers of Scripture, but that it is shared by good men of every age. That there is a spirit in man, and that "the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding," that the gifts and powers with which men are endued are directly from God, no believer in Revelation will dispute. Nay, that through His own servants God still speaks, and that, as they proclaim pardon and peace in His name, and under His guidance, it is not they that speak, but "the Spirit of their Father" which speaketh in them, and that the words which they thus speak on earth are ratified in heaven, we, for our part, devoutly believe. But if they are so, it is not because they constitute a new Revelation, but because they are in accordance with the inspired Revelation already given. To claim for the utterances or the writings of any man, however saintly, the authority which belongs to the Scriptures is to degrade the Book of God from its unique position above the literature of the world,

to open the door to the wildest enthusiasms, and expose those who advance such a claim to all the perils of spiritual pride and self-deception. To one simple test let all such pretensions be brought. Are those who make them prepared to say that "if any man add" to their utterances or writings "God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in His Book," and "if any man shall take away" anything from what they may have said or written, "God shall take away his part out of the Book of Life and out of the Holy City" ? (Rev. xxii. 18, 19). If they are not, let them take heed how they place their words or writings on the same level with those of the authorised Revelation of Him whose "Word is truth."

If, however, I am still pressed for an answer, I can only reply that the *mode* of inspiration is beyond human definition. For seventeen centuries, at least, the Church of Christ deliberately refrained from defining it. And she showed her wisdom in refraining. The attempts of later days to distinguish between "the inspiration of superintendence," "the inspiration of elevation," "the inspiration of direct revelation," &c., have ended as they deserved to end—in failure. The truth is we are no more qualified to pronounce upon the mystery of Inspiration than we are upon the mystery of the Incarnation. In both the divine and the human elements are blended ; but how they are united it passes the

wit of man to show. In the Scriptures we find that (in the words of a master in Israel) "the Holy Ghost has cast himself into a Book;" but how the Urim and Thummim shine through "the living oracles," the Divine Author alone can tell.

But though we cannot fully say what inspiration is, we may be able to remove some misconceptions if we make clear what it is not. And, first, let it be remembered that when we affirm the inspiration of Holy Scripture, we have in view *not existing documents, but the original manuscripts only*. "For ever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in heaven" (Ps. cxix. 89). "In which version?" said the scoffing philosopher to whom I was talking. "*In the original version,*" I replied. What we believe is not that there are not slips and errors in the copies of Holy Writ which have come down to us, although of these there are none affecting any cardinal doctrine of the faith, but that *in the original documents*, "as the ink trickled out of the pen" of the scribe, every word and every turn of expression was under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and that, whether the words recorded were directly inspired, or whether, as in the case of historical books, existing documents were made use of, nothing was allowed to pass the Divine Censor without such a *stamp and seal of heavenly authority* upon it as made it, for all readers, and for all time, God's Word written.

But while we say this, *we do not mean* (as some appear to think we must) *that Scripture is written in scientific language*. It could not be so written, for the scientific language of one age differs widely from that of the next. It alters with the advance of knowledge. And Scripture, whose great object is "to show us the way to heaven, not to show us how the heavens do go," was not intended to anticipate its progress. Hence it is that the Bible is written not in scientific but in popular language, adapted to the understanding of "all sorts and conditions of men." But popular language is a very different thing from untruthful language, and we have no more right to condemn the writers of Scripture for telling us that "the sun had risen upon the earth," than we should have to charge a man of science with falsehood because he told his children that "the kettle boils" !

*Nor are we to be understood to contend that all parts of Scripture are necessarily of equal value.* The hyssop that springs upon the wall is as truly the work of the Creator as the cedar that strikes its roots into the sides of Lebanon ; yet few, I suppose, would deny that the cedar is more valuable than the hyssop. So if you put side by side the Book of Esther and the Gospel of St. John, and ask me which I prefer, I have no hesitation in choosing the Gospel. But this does not affect the inspiration of Esther. Both books are equally inspired,



but the one is far more precious and profitable to me than the other.

*Neither*, when we say that all Scripture is inspired, *do we mean that every statement therein recorded, or every scene therein described, has necessarily received God's sanction, or been authorised by Him.* The unthinking objection has often been raised that the scenes of ungodliness or deeds of evil recorded in Scripture are incompatible with the idea of its divine authorship. But it is obvious that we have to distinguish between the inspiration of the record and the inspiration of the thing recorded. When the tempter said to the woman, "Ye shall not surely die," he certainly was not inspired in his utterance; yet the Scripture which contains the utterance is inspired. When Pontius Pilate took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person, see ye to it" (Matt. xxvii. 24), his action and his words were certainly not inspired, yet St. Matthew was inspired to record them.

Nay, as has been often observed, the fact that the sins and lapses even of good men are set down in Scripture, furnishes a powerful argument for the truth of the record. Human biographies are not written after this fashion. It is customary for authors to be to the faults of their hero "a little blind." But in Scripture the falls of Noah and David and Peter are as faithfully exhibited as their



graces. Like the sun which, remaining itself undimmed, shines with equal radiance on the dung-hill and the palace, the glory of the Sacred Page illumines with impartial light the lives of men, revealing their characters, whether fair or foul—not as they ought to have been, but as they really were, and in so doing it not only receives no defilement, it furnishes an unconscious testimony to the divinity of its Source.

Further, when we say that all Scripture is inspired by God, *we do not mean to exclude, as some suppose, the human element in the Scriptures*; that is to say, we do not mean by plenary inspiration what some have termed a mechanical inspiration, as if the writers of the Bible were mere machines, like musical instruments played upon by the musician, but taking no conscious or intelligent share in producing the melody. They were instruments, without a doubt, and they even expressly tell us that they often did not understand the meaning of their own prophecies (1 Peter i. 11, 12), but they were not merely like an Æolian harp, played upon by the heavenly gale; they were “living and thinking men.” In a way unknown to us, the Holy Spirit used their gifts which He had Himself bestowed, their mental faculties, their powers of expression, and yet so used them that, while the men who spoke it were themselves, the Word spoken was God’s. Thus the Scriptures are not a mono-

tonous literary plain ; there is an endless diversity in the landscape. We trace the difference between the magnificent strains of Isaiah's poetry and the plain prose of Jeremiah or Amos. We recognise the marvellous grasp of mind and psychological insight of the author of the Epistle to the Romans, and we do not expect to find in St. Peter the same mental characteristics as distinguish St. Paul.

But, while this is so, it remains true that the writings of Holy Scripture, however diverse their features, and whether directly inspired or selected under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit from existing documents, did all at length receive such an imprimatur of divine authority, not only as regards their thoughts, but their language, as constituted them for us God's Word written.

If this be what we believe as to inspiration, it is time to ask—

#### WHY WE BELIEVE IT

1. The first answer is, *Because Scripture itself affirms it.* Our first appeal, necessarily, must be to the Book itself, and the answer it gives us is decisive. "All Scripture," says St. Paul in his famous utterance (2 Tim. iii. 16), "is God-breathed." It matters nothing to the argument whether the words of the original are rendered (as in the R.V.) "every Scripture," or (as in the A.V.) "all Scripture." If the former, the inspiration of every

separate part of Scripture is affirmed, the parts themselves being already defined by the expression "the Holy Scriptures" of verse 15. Yet on every ground I agree with Bishop Ryle and other scholars that the A.V. is preferable. The rendering from a grammatical point of view is, as he points out, amply justified by parallel expressions such as "all flesh" (Luke iii. 6) and "all the house of Israel" (Acts ii. 36); and from a common-sense standpoint it seems a mere truism to translate "every writing inspired of God is profitable." Of course it is, or why should it be inspired? In any case here, in the most direct language possible, the inspiration of the holy writings is declared, and what further assurance can be required? This passage, however, conclusive as it is, is so far from standing alone that it would rather seem to gather up into a single focus the universal testimony of both the Old and New Testaments. Scarcely can you open the Bible but your eye rests on some such expression as "Thus saith the Lord," "the Lord spake," "the Word of the Lord came," and similar express declarations. Nor is there anything more remarkable than the way in which (when, for example, a passage from the Old Testament is quoted in the New) the writer is often altogether ignored and the statement ascribed directly to God Himself, or if the writer's name be mentioned it is only as the mouthpiece of the Divine Author.

See, in illustration of this, such passages (among many others) as Acts i. 16 (“This Scripture must needs have been fulfilled which *the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David* spake,” &c.); Acts iii. 21 (“Which *God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began*”); and again (where the names of writers are altogether omitted), Heb. iii. 7, “*The Holy Ghost saith To-day*” (the quotation being from Ps. xcv.), and Heb. x. 15, “*The Holy Ghost is a witness to us*” (the quotation which follows being taken from the prophet Jeremiah, chapter xxxi. 33, 34). In the face of passages such as these, which could be multiplied almost indefinitely, the question of the inspiration of Holy Scripture is, for the humble believer at any rate, surely set at rest for ever. But, further, we believe in the inspiration of Scripture—

2. *Because the condition of mankind requires it.* Is it conceivable that a God of love should leave Himself without witness in the world that he has made? Is there to be no voice, nor any answer to His creature’s cry? It is not so. God has spoken—spoken authoritatively, spoken from heaven: and, that there might be no question as to His meaning, His words have been written in a Book. *Litera scripta manet*—“Put it in writing” is the request continually made in matters of importance among men. God has put His will in writing. There it is, patent, permanent, port-

able ; there it may be perused and pondered and prized and practised by every willing and obedient disciple. But, if this be so, one thing is essential. The writing thus delivered to me must be universally inspired. If the Bible is not universally inspired it is practically no Bible at all. If I am left to my own verifying faculty to determine what is and what is not the Word of Life, how can I ensure myself against the possibility of error ? What mockery to put into my hands a guide-book to the skies, and in the same breath to inform me that I must decide for myself how much of it is worthy of credit. What would a traveller say to a Baedeker or a Murray constructed on such principles ? I do not think it would have a very wide circulation. Take the vexed question of the dual authorship of Isaiah as an illustration in point. In the January (1901) number of the *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Kegan, Paul, Trench and Co.) there is an article entitled "Isaiah the Myth and Isaiah the Prophet." In it the opinions of six leading higher critics of the day on the authorship of Isaiah are carefully compared, with the result that with scarcely an exception no two of them agree together. But, if this is the case with experts in a matter which some may think of secondary importance, what is to become of the wayfaring man unaccustomed to the intricacies of literary research in matters of the highest importance ? Truly, for

him the solid ground beneath his feet becomes a quagmire, and the highway to heaven a hopeless labyrinth.

3. But, again, I believe the Bible to be inspired *because the consciousness of the seeking soul responds to it*. I say "of the seeking soul," for this book is an oracle, and does not reveal its secrets to every one. This book is a living book. "It has hands and feet," as Luther says; yes, and eyes too, "like a flame of fire, which pierce to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and discern the thoughts and intents of the heart of the reader." It knows how to reveal its truths to its friends and hide them from its foes. There are wondrous things in God's law, but it needs opened eyes to behold them. "But, Mr. Turner," said an astonished student as he watched the painting of the great master, "I never saw a sky like that." "Don't you wish you could?" was the reply. It is a question of vision. The natural man may discern in God's Word nothing but the utterances of human genius, but the soul bowed down with the burden of sin says, "Come, see a Book which told me all things that ever I did. Is not this the Book of God?" To such a soul the divine authority of Scripture needs no commendation. He knows its Author to be divine, for he has laid bare the secrets of his heart. "What!" said MacGowan, the Chinese missionary, after a graphic description of the struggles of a Chinaman of the literary class with



the opium habit and his final triumph, "would you dare tell that man that Genesis i. was not inspired? *It was inspired for him*, for it was the means of his salvation."

Yes, the Bible is its own evidence. The late Dr. Dale, of Birmingham, in one of his books records a striking testimony by a Japanese convert on this subject. The young man had been for many years a student of Confucius, and had often been perplexed by finding in the writings of Confucius references to heaven. He could not determine from his studies whether the heaven referred to was a person or whether it was a place. Sometimes it was spoken of almost as a person, at other times as a place, and he could find no explanation of his difficulty. While much perplexed by these things he heard a lecture, not from a Christian, but from another religionist, exposing the weaknesses of the system of Confucius. This prepared him (perhaps unconsciously) for the reading of the New Testament, which was soon afterwards placed in his hand, and his own account of it was that when he read for the first time the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul's hymn of love, as he read the glory and the beauty of the character unfolded, he was so overcome that he exclaimed, "*This is heaven*; this account must come from heaven itself; this is not human, it is divine." The result soon after was his own conversion to the faith of Christ. There



was an instance of the Bible being its own evidence, carrying with it an authority which proved irresistible.

But, again, I believe in the inspiration of Scripture—and for the moment I speak especially of the Old Testament Scriptures—*because the Jews, with whom the conservation and defence of their ancient writings was a passion, and who had far better opportunities than any Twentieth Century scholars, however learned, can have of knowing what were and what were not canonical writings* received as God's Word the very same books as those with which we are now familiar as the Scriptures of the Old Testament. It may be worth while to insert the well-known passage from Josephus in which this matter is referred to. It runs thus (Tract v. Apion, Bk. I. ch. 8): "For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us disagreeing from and contradicting each other (as the Greeks have), but only twenty-two<sup>1</sup> books, which contain the record of all past times, *which are justly believed to be divine*. And of them five belong to Moses, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind until his death. This interval of time was little less than 3000 years. But as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of

<sup>1</sup> "The number is spoken of as twenty-two to make it correspond with the number of the Hebrew alphabet, and this was done by combining Ruth with Judges, and Lamentations with Jeremiah." (Behrends).

Artaxerxes, King of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets who were after Moses wrote down what was done in their time in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life. How firmly we have given credit to these books of our own nation is evident by what we do ; for *during so many ages as have already elapsed no one hath been so bold as either to add anything to them, or take anything from them, or to make any change in them.* But it becomes natural to all Jews, immediately and from their very birth, to esteem these books to contain divine doctrines and to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willingly to die for them. For it is no new thing for our captives, many of them in number and frequently in time, to be seen to endure racks and death of all kinds upon the theatres, that they may not be obliged to say one word against our laws or the records that contain them ; whereas there are none at all among the Greeks who would undergo the least harm on that account ; no, nor in the case if all the writings that are among them were to be destroyed."

This is Josephus' testimony, who was born, be it remembered, in the year 37, and whose "life covers the lives of the apostles Paul and John." But we have more ancient testimony still, for the Septuagint, the old Greek translation of the Old Testament, was begun 280 B.C., and finished 150 B.C.,

and in this translation "not one of our present books is missing,"<sup>1</sup> though the Apocrypha, sometimes bound up in our own Bibles was also inserted. It is open to any one to decide for himself whether he prefers to believe, with Josephus and the translators of the LXX., in the Scriptures as they have come down to us, or with the higher (?) critics such as Kuenen, Wellhausen, and their followers in this country, who inform us that Deuteronomy, for example, was a forgery of Josiah's reign, and palmed off by Hilkiah on a generous and unsuspecting monarch and people. For my part, I know not whether to wonder most at the audacity which can make such a suggestion or at the gullibility of those who can accept it. At least the charge of overcredulity can never be levelled by such teachers at the professors of orthodoxy.

But, again, we believe the Scriptures to be inspired *because the Church militant here upon earth says so*. The attack upon the truth of inspiration is comparatively of recent date. For centuries, from apostolic times downwards, the question was never raised. Nothing is more remarkable than the consensus of the East and the West, of Roman Catholic and Protestant, of Churchman and Non-conformist on the subject of the inspiration of Scripture. As the late Dr. Brookes has well shown, in his pamphlet on the subject, the testimony of the

<sup>1</sup> Behrends' "Old Testament under Fire," p. 84.

Fathers, the confessions of the Reformation (Belgic, Helvetic, Presbyterian,) even the decrees of the Vatican and the Catechism of the Eastern Church agree in upholding the divine origin and authority of the Scriptures. It is strange, to say the least of it, that on a matter of such vital importance the Church universal should have been suffered to remain in darkness for centuries until the higher critics arose to enlighten it.

Further, we believe the Scriptures to be inspired *because the Church triumphant in heaven says so*. ‘They have Moses and the prophets,’ said Abraham, to Dives, in the parable, “let them hear them.” No doubt, apparently, is entertained in the abodes of the blest, as to the inspiration of Scripture—unless we are prepared to charge the Author of the history or parable (be it which you please), the Eternal Truth Himself, with a *suggestio falsi*. Nor is this alternative a rhetorical flourish. It is to this issue, at last, that we are compelled to come. The testimony of the Church is invaluable, but the testimony of Christ is *infallible*. Our faith stands not in the wisdom of men, but in the faithfulness of God.

*We believe the Bible to be inspired because the Christ whom it has revealed to us, says it is.* This, after all, is the kernel of the whole matter. You may rely upon it, it is impossible to maintain your faith in the infallibility of Christ if you lose your faith in the inspiration of His Word. This is the very

stronghold and citadel of the defence, the key to the whole position.

To attempt to enter upon a consideration of all the passages in which our Lord has set His seal upon the Scriptures of the Old Testament, would be to turn this booklet into a volume. Those who desire to pursue the subject can hardly do better than possess themselves of Bishop Ellicott's excellent little book, "Christus Comprobator" (S.P.C.K.), if it is still in print. But there are one or two passages to which reference must be made, and they are really decisive in themselves. The first shall be that most striking utterance in Matt. v. 17, 18: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled." These words, "jot or tittle," are well understood by every reader of Hebrew. The "jot," or Hebrew "yod," is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet; whilst the "tittle" applies to the little turns and strokes in the letters which distinguish them from one another. Thus the Lord goes so far as to say that the Scriptures of the Old Testament shall not be tampered with, even to the extent of a letter or part of a letter.

To this may be added the famous passage in John x. 34, where our Lord makes His argument

with the Jews turn upon the single word "gods" in Psalm lxxxii. 6, and declares, in doing so, that "*the Scripture cannot be broken.*" Well may the late Bishop Ryle, in drawing attention to this verse, add: "The theories of those who say that the ideas of the Bible are inspired, but not all the language in which these ideas are conveyed, appear to be totally irreconcilable with our Lord's use of this passage." And, let it never be forgotten, this testimony of Christ to the Scripture was given not only during the period of His "Kenosis," as it has been termed; it was given on the day of His Resurrection, when sin, death, and hell were captives at his feet. *It is in the walk to Emmaus (Luke xxiv. 44) that He once more endorses the whole Jewish canon as it is known to us, and as it was known to Him. This, surely, is decisive as to the whole question, even if it stood alone.*

One other consideration only shall be added. We believe in the inspiration of Scripture *because it is dishonouring to the Holy Ghost to doubt it.* An attempt has been made to weaken the testimony of Christ to Scripture on the ground of the "Kenosis" to which reference has just been made, that is, that during His humiliation as man He submitted to limitations in knowledge, and that therefore He might possibly have been mistaken when He ascribed, for example, the one hundred and tenth Psalm to David, or when He endorsed the history of Jonah,



or when He quoted from the Book of Daniel. The answer to that most serious imputation is, first, that such critics appear to have overlooked the mystery of the two natures in one Person, a fact which would make error an impossibility. "Before Abraham was I am," is not the utterance of a man on the same level of knowledge as ourselves.

And, further, whatever may have been the limitations to which He condescended, let it never be forgotten that the Holy Ghost, from the time of His baptism, became, we might term with reverence, the Spiritual Director of the Man Christ Jesus, and that it is precisely stated that it was "through the Holy Ghost He gave commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen" (Acts i. 2), and that it was in the power of the Spirit He wrought and worked His miracles.

Little, indeed, do we hear of the Person and work of the Holy Ghost in the arid pages of Higher Criticism. "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" is a question that should be addressed to all who undertake to pronounce on the authority of Scripture. If they are ignorant of the Author of Scripture, are they likely to be safe interpreters of His writings? For let it never be forgotten, when the questions of authorship involved in our Lord's quotations from the Old Testament are discussed, that, though David and Daniel were the writers, the Holy Spirit was the



Author of these ancient prophecies. To deny our Lord's accuracy with reference to them is to be driven to the conclusion either that He did not understand the guidance of the Holy Spirit when these references to the Old Testament were made, or, more profanely still, that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, was capable of leading Him astray. To such terrible straits do those appear to be reduced who begin by denying the inspiration of God's Word written.

But we have already exceeded our proposed limits, and must bring these lines to a close. Let it ever be our part to show our reverence for the Scripture, not only by acknowledging its authority, but by submitting to its precepts, by hiding it in our hearts, and by exemplifying it in our lives. The Scripture has no need of our defence. It has outlived ten thousand foes. It will outlive ten thousand more. "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof fadeth away; but the Word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the Word which by the Gospel is preached unto you" (1 Peter i. 25).

## CHAPTER XXI

### ITS CONDITIONS: COMMUNION

#### (III.) THE SCRIPTURES (*continued*)

“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”

“Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.”

THE same sun that hardens clay, melts wax. “To the one,” says the Apostle, “we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life.” The same seed, our Lord teaches us, scattered in different soils will meet with a very varied reception. The difference is not in the seed but in the soil. The same truth which aroused the tumult in Thessalonica met with a loving reception at Berea. “These,” we are informed, “were more noble than those of Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” There is a nobility of mind, as well as a nobility of birth. God’s patent of it is described here. These men were accounted noble because they “searched the Scriptures.”

Let us consider—

## I. THE OBJECT OF THEIR SEARCH

Why did they take these pains with the Scripture ?

Well, not to cavil at the truth they found in it. There is such a thing as searching the Scriptures to discover, if possible, some flaw in them. There are men who read them with hostile eyes, and who would, if they could, discredit them altogether. Such men have been found in every age. They have done their worst, but the citadel of Truth defies their utmost efforts. They may have chipped off a human addition here, or pointed out some defect of human transcribing there, but the essential fabric of Truth stands like Gibraltar—impregnable and immovable still.

The Bereans were not seekers of this order. They searched the Scriptures, but it was *to ascertain the Truth* through them. In their eyes the Scriptures constituted the final Court of Appeal. "What is Truth ?" asks one; "where shall we find it ?" The Bereans could have informed him—you will find it in the Scriptures. The Scriptures for them were the source and fountain of truth.

Mark—not the Church, but the Scriptures. There are some who tell us that the Bible is the child of the Church, and that it is the Church that has given us the Bible. But this is a confusion which needs only to be examined to be rejected. The Church

is a witness and keeper of Holy Writ. She can tell you, and her testimony is most valuable, which books of the Old and New Testament were received as Divinely inspired when first they were circulated. But that is a very different thing from claiming to be the author of the books themselves. That

#### THE BIBLE WAS BEFORE THE CHURCH

is plain for two reasons : first, it was through the reception of the spoken Word that the Church was brought into existence, for “as many as received the Word were baptized,” and thus the Church was constituted ; and, secondly, the Word thus spoken and received was none other than the written Word of the Old Testament Scriptures explained and enforced. It follows that the Word is certainly not the child of the Church, but on the contrary, the Church is the child of the Word. “If any man have an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches.” Not what the Church says to the Churches. The Word of God owes its authority to the Spirit who spoke it and wrote it, not to the Church, for whose instruction it was given.

And it was on this principle the Apostles acted. They claimed no authority for themselves apart from Scripture ; they appealed to the Scriptures. As we read in this very chapter, verses two and three : “Paul, as his manner was, went in unto

them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead ; and that this Jesus whom I preach unto you is Christ." If what he said was not found there, he asked no man to believe it. The Bereans therefore searched the Scriptures that they might ascertain the truth.

But they did more than this. They searched the Scriptures that they might *ascertain the truth about Christ*. Paul, and the Apostles, brought certain strange things to their ears. They had been accustomed to hear of Christ in the Old Testament Scripture, but they had not thought of Him as a suffering, but as a reigning Messiah. Paul's theme was a Suffering Christ. "Christ must needs have suffered" was his constant cry. This was new doctrine to them. That He must needs reign, they all understood. Had not Jeremiah said : "A King shall reign in righteousness" ? but that He must be numbered with the transgressors—that they had overlooked. It came upon them as a shock and as a surprise.

We know that Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling-block. To be told that the Messiah for whom all the ages had waited, had died a felon's death outside Jerusalem—this was more than they were prepared to hear. It seemed incredible ! Perhaps at this distance of time we do not realise

what a reversal of all the Messianic hopes of Judaism Calvary really was. But these people—to their honour be it said—did not reject the doctrine because it was new to them. “They searched the Scriptures daily *whether those things were so,*” and in this they leave us an example.

#### THERE ARE STILL NEW TRUTHS

that is, new to our apprehension, though not new new to God—which we have to learn concerning Christ and His death. Do we suppose that any one of us has exhausted the meaning of that marvellous death? We read in Peter: “Angels desire to look into it.” Angelic intelligences, to whom the secrets of nature which have absorbed the attention of a Darwin or Huxley are simplicity itself, to whom they present no kind of difficulty—the angels desire to gaze into the depths of that suffering of Christ, which to the wise men of this world is foolishness.

But let us look for a moment at—

#### II. THE MANNER OF THEIR SEARCH

How did they conduct it?

First, *candidly*. They had their difficulties, but they were willing to be convinced. Prejudice was laid aside. What a hindrance is prejudice! It is a coat of mail, against which argument seems powerless to prevail. It is like looking through coloured

glass ; to the man who looks through yellow glasses all the world is yellow. Nothing can be done until the prejudice is laid aside. These men—to their everlasting honour be it stated—were free from prejudice. It might be said of them, as of Nathaniel of old : “ Behold Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile ! ” They searched the Scriptures candidly.

But more than this, they searched them *cordially*. By which I mean their hearts as well as their heads were interested in the result. They did not regard the study merely as an intellectual exercise ; they were not about to look upon the verification of St. Paul’s statements as merely a new view of truth, something which would interest the mind without affecting the heart or the life. It is clear from the whole tenor of the narrative that their hearts were profoundly touched, that they felt that this might be a turning-point in their history. They received the Word with readiness—almost eagerness—as it might be translated. They were hungry and thirsty for the truth. They longed to know if it were really true that Jesus had died to save them from their sins and to be to them a constant Guide and Friend.

Yet once again, we may say that they searched the Scriptures *critically*. Interested as they were, they were not credulous. They resolved to know the truth. They would exercise their private judgment. Notice that the Apostles did—



### NOT CONDEMN THE EXERCISE OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT

on the contrary, they would urge it. "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." And St. John: "Try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world." How different is such judgment from the directions of the Church of Rome as given in the false Creed of Pius the Fourth in the following terms:—

"I admit the Sacred Scriptures according to the sense which the Holy Mother Church has held and does hold; to whom it belongs to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, nor will I ever take and interpret them otherwise than according to the unanimous consent of the Fathers."

What would have become of St. Paul's preaching at Berea if inquirers had to wait for the "unanimous consent" of the Jewish Fathers, the Scribes and Pharisees? The Church would not have numbered many members, I think. It is the glory of Christianity that each individual has the right of direct access to God Himself, and that each individual may be guided by the Holy Spirit into all truth, for "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. viii. 14). Coleridge says: "There are some readers who may be compared to an hour-glass, the reading being like the sand which

runs in and runs out, and leaves not a vestige behind. There are others that have been compared to a sponge, which imbibes everything and returns it nearly in the same state. But again there are others that are likened to the gold digger, who sifts the true from the false and retains only the pure metal." The Bereans seem to have come under this third class. They sifted the evidence, refusing that which was irrelevant, and retaining that which was conclusive.

Once more, they searched the Scriptures *continually*, "daily," we read. They felt that not much could be done by a hasty or a cursory perusal. No certain results could be obtained at a single sitting; they must come again and again, until the truth began to dawn on their minds. The hurried, careless reader will never gain much knowledge of the truth. You cannot know a country, it has been well said, by driving through it on the highways. You must sojourn in it, you must explore its hills and valleys. It takes time to enter into its treasures and scenes of beauty.

So it is with the Scriptures. How few there are who really know their Bibles. I can never forget an incident, which I hardly like to repeat, which illustrates the extraordinary ignorance of Scripture sometimes found even among the educated class in our own land. I was visiting a house years ago in London at a time of sorrow, and in seeking to

comfort a parishioner who had been bereaved, I quoted the words "In My Father's House are many mansions," when to my amazement a lady at the other end of the room interrupted the conversation with the remark: "Ah yes, *that was what the dying thief said, was it not?*" Yet, as I found afterwards, she was what is called "a leader of fashion."

Let us lay this example of the Bereans to heart. What time do we give ourselves over the Scripture? You say that we live in the twentieth century, in the rush and whirl of life and business, and that we have no time as those before us seem to have had for quiet and for study; but it becomes a serious question whether it is not our duty to make time. The man that habitually neglects the food of the body must inevitably suffer. The man who neglects to feed his soul will suffer also.

### DO WE KNOW OUR BIBLES?

Suppose we were to give the same time daily to the reading of Scripture which we now give to the reading of newspapers and magazines, should we not make rapid strides in our knowledge of Scripture? Let me press this point upon you. Salvation, we all know, is through faith, but "knowledge of the Scriptures," it has been well said, "is by works." Do we know our Bibles? Do we know this part of them—the Acts of the Apostles, which we are considering? Could we give an account of Paul's

missionary tours—the places he visited, the sermons he preached, his sorrows and his successes ?

Depend upon it, it is ignorance of the Scripture that makes it so uninteresting. The less you know of a thing the less you care to know, but the more you know of a subject the more you long to know. And it is even so with the Bible.

But it is not alone as a question of acquiring knowledge that we should continue in the searching of Scripture. We need it for our daily bread. We need it for daily communion with our Lord. Let it never be forgotten that this Book stands in a different relation to us from any other book. It is not a dead book. It is a living one. Its words are the living oracles—see Acts vii. 38 and Romans iii. 2. An oracle even among the heathen was a place of communication with the unseen world. God's Word is the Holy Oracle.

#### CHRIST IS BEHIND THE BOOK

and as you read it you may hear His voice ringing through the chambers of your soul ; as you ponder it, He—the Author, He—the Subject of the Book—Himself is at hand to manifest Himself to you as He does not to the world. The Bible is the trysting-place between the soul and the Saviour. Neglect it at your peril. As He led the disciples on the way to Emmaus in the hour of their sadness from themselves to the Scriptures, and from the Scriptures to

Himself, so will He lead us. If we want to live a life of daily communion with our Master we must search the Scriptures.

But what were—

### III. THE RESULTS OF THIS SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES ?

We read in the twelfth verse : “ Therefore many of them believed.”

The first result was *faith*. “ Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” How many complaints there are of a lack of faith. Alas ! it is said, if I could only believe : my difficulty is there. But if you would believe, occupy yourself with that which produces belief. If you want faith, occupy yourself with truth. Truth will make you believe before you are aware. “ If I say the truth,” said our Lord, “ why do you not believe Me ? ”

What a confession was that of Tom Paine, the infidel, who admitted that while he was writing against the New Testament, he had not a copy of it in his possession, nor ever referred to it ! The majority of the unbelievers in the Bible never read it. If they did, their unbelief would be untenable.

The second result of their study of the Scriptures was *fellowship*. A society was formed, a little church gathered—a church in which Jew and Greek, rich and poor, united. Honourable women threw in their lot with the despised and poor. Here is a

true Christian revolution—worked not by compulsion from without but by inspiration from within—Christian love rising above all barriers and uniting in common worship and in common interests. “All one in Christ Jesus.”

Here is an illustration of what we have just stated, that the Church is the child of the Bible, and not the Bible the child of the Church. It was through the searching of the Scriptures that faith sprang up in their hearts, and the outward expression of that faith was given in the formation of a Church in the midst of the surrounding heathen.

Finally, we may say that their searching of the Scriptures resulted in *fortitude*. There are some, said our Lord, who receive the Word, but when troubles or persecutions arise, presently, they are offended. But that was not the case with the little Church at Berea. Persecution followed hard upon their profession of faith in Christ. The Jews at Thessalonica, when they learnt what Paul was doing, sent men to Berea to stir up the people, but the little Church stood firm. The children stood by their spiritual father, and stood by the truth. Paul was conveyed away to a place of safety, and in later days was accompanied by one of the converts of Berea—Sosipater—who is mentioned in the twentieth of Acts, and again in the list of helpers at the close of the Epistle to the Romans.

Has not this story of the Bereans a message for

ourselves ? Never were there days in which it was more needful to test the utterances we hear, whether from pulpit or platform, by the touchstone of the Word. Be assured that the time and labour which you spend over your Bible will repay you a hundred-fold. Make the Bible your daily counsellor. Are you in sorrow ?—it will comfort you. Are you in perplexity ?—it will enlighten you. Are you in journey ?—it will lead you. Do you sleep ?—it will keep you. When you wake, it will talk with you. In life it will protect you, and in death it will give you “an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour ” Jesus Christ.



## CHAPTER XXII

### ITS PROSPECT • GLORY

“The God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.”—1 PETER v. 10.

If you carefully read the epistles of Peter you will find that their general subject is fairly summed up in the two words suffering and glory. The teaching of the Old Testament prophets, he tells us, was similarly characterised. “The Spirit of Christ which was in them . . . testified beforehand of *the sufferings* of Christ *and the glory* that should follow” (1 Peter i. 11). Peter has a great deal to tell us of glory. He has been called the apostle of hope, even as Paul has been termed the apostle of faith and John the apostle of love. Observe first of all—

#### I. THE PROSPECT HE SETS BEFORE THE CHURCH

It is a great thing to have a good prospect. Nothing is more animating than the hope which a bright prospect kindles. And what is the Christian's hope? It is the hope of *glory*. There is “nothing but glory before a Christian.” It may

not seem to be so, but it is so. All the best days of a Christian are to come. Those of us who have travelled far in the journey of life are not getting older, we are getting younger. All the brightest and best and youngest and happiest days are before us. That is more than the worldling, the man who is still in arms against God and his Christ can say, but it is what every Christian, even the humblest, can say. I remember years ago in my ministry in London being much struck by the utterance of a dying friend, who had, as it turned out, but twenty-four hours to live. As I stood by her to seek to minister words of consolation to her, she said "What *a life* is opening before me!" Her thought was not of death but of life. Death was at the threshold, but she was not thinking of it. Death to her was *only* a threshold, a gloomy portal through which she passed into endless life. And so it is for every Christian. Death is, as some one says, "a sunken fence, there are green fields beyond." Death is a dark corridor which leads you into the glorious palace of the King. Death is a shadow, the reality is the glory that is beyond the shadow. Yes, the reality is the glory. When the Scripture speaks of the heavenly glory it describes it as possessed of substance, solidity, reality. In 2 Cor. iv. 17 there is the significant expression: "Eternal *weight of glory*." It has weight, it has reality. This world has glory, too,

but it is empty. It is like a pageant for which you wait in the street. You hear the clatter of the horses' hoofs, the rolling of the wheels, the blare of the trumpets. You see the gay equipages, the gleaming colours, but even as you look at it, it is gone. So passes the glory of the world. "The fashion of this world passeth away" (1 Cor. vii. 31).

Is it not amazing that men can be so taken up with the shadows, the vain, empty, unsubstantial honours of earth that they have no thought or care for the solid weight of the real glory that God has in reserve for His children? As Burke, the great orator, said once, "What shadows we are and what shadows we pursue," but the reflection, so far as I know, did not lead him to relinquish their pursuit.

"Some have found the world is vain,  
Yet from the world they break not free."

Fame and pleasure and wealth and a thousand things that men follow are transitory and vain. Every now and then they are seen to be so, and yet too often men cannot be persuaded to relinquish the quest and "set their affections on things above, not on things on the earth."

But observe again what the Apostle says. He says the *glory for which we wait* is *eternal glory*. It is not only substantial, it is lasting. There is a contrast here between the sufferings and the glory. "The God of all grace, who hath called us unto

his *eternal* glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a *while*;" in the Greek it is a *little while*. The same word was on the Saviour's lips: "A little while and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father" (John xvi. 16). The sufferings are temporary, but the glory is eternal. "After that ye have suffered a while." Are you in deep waters, are you under a cloud, have you a weight upon your heart? Remember, it is only for a little while. Yet a brief space and you will forget it as waters that pass away. In the verse quoted just now from 1 Cor. iv., the same thought occurs: "Our light affliction, which is *but for a moment*." In God's estimation, life is only a moment. The days we live—the sad, sorrowful days—will be gone in a moment. The burden that oppresses and crushes down your spirit will be gone in a moment. The trials that now seem to bulk so largely before your eyes will soon dwindle into insignificance; they will pass out of sight and out of mind. "We spend our years as a tale that is told" (Ps. xc. 9). "Some parts of the tale are sad, others are pleasing; some are interesting, others are dull." But whatever it is, you will soon write "Finis" over it all; it will soon be over. "For what is your life? It is even a vapour which appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away." Once more — *this glory is our destiny* if we are

Christians. "The God of all grace who *hath called us to eternal glory.*" It is not left in uncertainty ; God has *called us* to glory. "Well," you say, "He has called me to a great many trials and sorrows too." It may be so, but His call goes beyond the sorrow to the glory. It is not left to a peradventure. Christ is *bringing* many sons unto glory ; He is not, as I heard a brother say once, *attempting* to do it, He is *doing* it. "Whom he called, them he also justified : and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Rom. viii. 30). It is an effectual call, a call to glory. But let us look at the sufferings more closely and consider the character of

## II. THE PROCESS THROUGH WHICH WE MUST PASS

on our way to the glory. Christianity gives us both sides of human history. It does not leave out of sight the trying, dark passages of life. There are some stories of human life which have been well compared to Chinese pictures—they have no shade. But such stories are uninteresting as well as untrue. That is a very inadequate view of human life that leaves out *suffering*. God does not leave out suffering. This epistle is written to comfort men in suffering. The Apostle says, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." Do not be surprised if you are called to pass through

the furnace. "God had one Son without sin, but not one without suffering." "If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons" (Heb. xii. 8). In a world like this there must be suffering, and suffering of many kinds. But suffering has its solemn uses. Suffering shows that God is in earnest with us. Suffering has been called by an eloquent writer "God's mute prophet in the body, giving there its mighty silent oracles to the soul." And how it speaks! You cannot but hear it. It speaks in a voice to which the most indifferent must listen. It tells us that life is something more than a pleasure trip. Pain is a great educator. It teaches us the character of God. It teaches us that God's love is so strong that He will not hesitate to inflict pain upon us; He does not seem to think much of the painful process through which we have to pass (although his sympathy never fails us), if only the good end He has in view is gained. As a wise and skilful surgeon, humane and kind though he be, does not hesitate to allow his patient to suffer if only he can cure, so does Christ deal with us. He is thinking of the outcome, the issue. He permits suffering though we cry and wince under it, and ask, "Why does this trial overtake me?" It is for the sake of the glory. God takes eternity in. "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. viii. 28), even the severest

and most trying, because He is preparing a place for us, and He is preparing us for the place. There is a home there and we must be ready to enter it. Hence the need to undergo the stern discipline of sorrow. The sufferings sent us are all formative, they serve a useful purpose, they are educating us for the "inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away" (1 Peter i. 4). The sufferings themselves vary of course in their character. Sometimes they are *physical sufferings*, and for my part (as I have remarked already), I believe there are few trials greater than the trials of physical distress. It is astonishing how men can bear up under every form of suffering provided their health is good. I do not say that physical suffering is the severest form of suffering, but it is certainly one of its severest forms. And yet where would our sympathy be if we had no suffering? God allows suffering, among other reasons, for this, that our sympathies may be drawn out to others. Have we not often when in suffering been astonished to find how much sympathy and kindness have been shown us? We have said, "I could not have believed that so much sympathy could have been shown me." The suffering drew it out.

But I conclude that the Apostle is not here speaking specially of physical suffering, but rather of *mental and spiritual distress*. The trials intended would seem to be connected with the assaults of



the Adversary, "whom" he bids us "resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." Trials and sufferings assail us in various forms—mental and spiritual. Each soul knows its own Gethsemane and its own Calvary. We may not always be able to indicate their source aright; we may not be able to say which of them has come directly from the chastening hand of God, which are the result of the malice and assaults of Satan, and which the outcome of the complex circumstances of human life, but each man can at least fill up the category of sorrow from his own experience. However mysterious they may seem let us never forget that they are preparing us for glory. They serve, as we have seen, a useful purpose and they last but a little while; let us be content to bear them cheerfully and humbly, and we shall not endure them in vain. One word I will add on—

### III. THE PETITION WHICH THE APOSTLE OFFERS

"After that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." The words are in the aorist tense, denoting an immediate work. The word "settle" is not given in the Revised Version. "Make you *perfect*." The same word is translated in Gal. vi. 1, "restored"; and

in Matt. iv. 21, "*mending*." The idea is that of bringing discordant elements into harmony, a dislocated limb into joint, a disordered piece of machinery into gear; or in the spiritual region a rebellious will into submission to the Divine. God wants to do this harmonising work in us. He wants us to be able to say "Yes, Lord," to every dispensation of His providence, "Yes, Lord" to every expression of His will. He would have our life a perpetual "yes" to His blessed will, not only in prosperity but adversity, not only in bright days but in dark. It is a high ideal, but it is the secret of abiding peace. It is the Promised Rest—the Rest of union with Him Who is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

"One with my Lord 'tis glorious to know  
The barriers are broken and gone ;  
Life and salvation my soul hath put on,  
Since I and my Saviour are one."

The privilege is great but—

IV. THE POWER ON WHICH THE APOSTLE RELIES  
to effect it is greater still.

The God of all grace undertakes the work. "The God of *all* grace"—the God of *electing* grace, the God of *pardoning* grace, the God of *sanctifying* grace, the God of *comforting* grace, the God of *glorifying* grace. Is there anything too hard for the Lord? Sin and Satan are mighty, but the God of all grace

is Almighty. He will “perfect that which concerneth us,” “He will guide us by His counsel and afterward receive us to glory,” He and He alone will give us—

REST.

“Grace all the work shall crown  
Through everlasting days;  
It lays in heaven the topmost stone,  
And well deserves the praise.”

AMEN.

THE END

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